GUINEVERE'S
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CHAPTER I

APRIL, 1905

HALF an hour ago the butler announced, "Sir Hugh Dremont."

I was helping Harriet, the head housemaid, to arrange the ground-floor library curtains as I liked, and was up on the step-ladder, quite unprepared for visitors, but Harriet went out of the room hurriedly and I got down and shook hands.

"I have disturbed you," Sir Hugh said, but he made no apology, so I answered as well as I could.

"You are such a near neighbor. I am very glad to see you—won't you sit down?"

He looked bored, but he sank into one of the uncomfortable chairs.

"I did not know if you were ready to receive visitors yet," he said, "but I was riding past, and was only going to leave a card, when your servant said you were at home."

"I am arranging this room," I answered. "The house has been neglected for so long. My husband has not been here for twenty years, and I had never seen it before a fortnight ago, when we came."

We said a few more ordinary things, and I had time to take in his appearance.

He is very tall and thin, and stoops rather, which is what I do not like, his face is as stern as a face can be, and he has very small whiskers, cut very close, which give him a strange, old-fashioned look. One expects to see a stock.

His nose is large and rather aquiline, and his eyes are large and deeply set, but I do not know of what color they are—dark-blue or gray, I expect. He looks indifferent and disagreeable.

He must be at least thirty-five, because I remember Humphrey speaking of his coming of age, as an event which took place just before our marriage, and that will be fourteen years ago this May.

It is absurd that I should find thirty-five old, considering that I am nearly thirty-one myself, but I have never had anything but old people about me—who are cross or tired of life, and I long for something young and joyous, who still believe in things.

Algernon is only thirteen, but he does not believe in things very much more than Humphrey does. They are distressingly alike, my son and his father. Sir Hugh did not seem to be taking much interest in our conversation. He stared out of the window most of the time, and then he said suddenly:

"There is the General coming across the courtyard. By Jove! How little changed he is!"

My gaze followed his, and it seemed that I took in Humphrey with fresh eyes, and I realized it was true, for except that his hair is white in places, and his glance is more fierce, and the sardonic expression round his mouth is now cut in two deep lines, he does not look very different from the *beau sabreur,* whom my father brought into the schoolroom, and afterwards told me I was to marry in a few weeks.

Humphrey was forty-five then, and I was nearly seventeen. But I always hate to think of those old days. How frightened I was of him—and am still!

His rasping voice and arrogant martinet manner have increased with time. My sister Letitia says he was very attractive when I married him, and had been the lover of a number of desirable women, but I never was able to see his charm.

"You have been out of England for years, have you not?" Sir Hugh asked, as Humphrey disappeared from view, going to the entrance. "And your tenants were seldom here. The villagers will be glad you have come back at last."

"Humphrey always said a home was a discouragement to his military duty," I answered, "and he would not return until he was free. Then since he left the Army we have wandered about abroad for the last three years, because

the Morleys' lease was not yet up—but now, I suppose we shall remain here for the rest of our lives!"

"This part of the world is very isolated. You will find there are hardly any neighbors, and only one or two of the old people left, beside myself," and Sir Hugh looked at me suddenly, and showed singularly strong white teeth, as he smiled a little. Perhaps he is not so disagreeable, after all.

"I like solitude. That is why I spend so much time at Minton Dremont," he went on. "Your husband is such an old friend of mine. I hope you will come and dine with me some day soon."

At that moment, Humphrey opened the door, and came in with a crisp, hearty greeting.

They talked about the world they knew, and then of horses, and what were the hunting prospects of next season, and what had been the record of last.

It must be nice to have some absorbing interest like that, which makes you friendly with people at once, and bridges the years. I felt stupid and stiff while I spoke to Sir Hugh alone. I have always been obliged to conceal my real feelings and tastes, and never have been allowed to enjoy them, so that now I seem always to wear a mask, and answer like an automaton.

Humphrey speaks of everything as his—never ours. To hear him you would think he was the only person in the case. He is going to have this or that tree cut down. He is going to do so and so with the garden.

"I hope I shall soon be settled comfortably; and then my wife and I will dine with pleasure," he said finally, and Sir Hugh prepared to go.

"It is awfully interesting, this house," he told me, as we walked with him through the vaulted stone passage to the entrance hall, "full of histories and thrilling stories. We are very proud of it in the neighborhood, on account of its age."

Humphrey stalked on ahead.

"I hate old houses," I said, as we shook hands. "I hate everything old—Good-bye."

Sir Hugh looked at me curiously, and the first gleam of fugitive interest came into his eyes.

And now I am awaiting the arrival of Letitia—my brilliant and successful sister Letitia, who is not afraid of Humphrey—or of anything in the world.

. . . . . .

Letitia came in her motor. She always has the latest thing, and although she is ten years older than I am, no one

would ever know it. I wish I saw her oftener. She brings me such glimpses of the world, and is so deliciously selfish and sensible and up to date.

I disliked her when I was a child after our mother died when I was ten, and she was twenty, and I was so glad when she made that brilliant marriage, and we saw no more of her. She was reluctantly going to bring me out—in my eighteenth year; then Humphrey took this wild infatuation for me, and she and my father married me off to him at once, four weeks before I was seventeen. Humphrey is rich and very careful with his money, and I have hardly anything of my own, that is why I am so humble, I suppose.

"My dearest girl," Letitia said. "You do waste yourself—more than ever; it makes me cross each time I see you. You are extraordinarily attractive-looking, you know, Guinevere, with your demure air and rebellious gleam in the eyes, and, although you are nearly thirty-one, you look a mere girl. I can't think how you keep so slender. If you were only better dressed I do not know any one who could have so much success."

I smiled—what else could I do?

"Yes, I know," she went on. "Humphrey did keep you absolutely shut up with his old sisters all those first years of your marriage after you found India did not suit you. It must have been insufferable, of course, but since he left the Army, you have wandered about abroad at all events—you might have picked up a more alive look."

"I have never been out in the street alone even," I said, "and I have never been allowed to talk to a man or have any intimate friends—one atrophies after a time."

"It is quite ridiculous!" Letitia exclaimed, startled, as though she suddenly realized something for the first time.

"We have all looked upon you as a child, I expect," she said rather hurriedly, "but now you have come back to England and this charming place, you must wake up and see your kind—though how people can live in the country all the year round, I don't know! Neighbors are always duties and bores, and there are not many to amuse you in any case. The Essendens are too far off, and the Perwoods too poor, but Humphrey's land touches Minton Dremont. Have you met him yet—Hugh Dremont?"

"Yes, he came to call just now."

"What do you think of him?"

"He is rather disagreeable-looking, and it is so odd in these days having those whiskers."

"You perfect goose!" and Letitia laughed. "If you only knew the world a little better, you would know that is just his *chic*. He wears them because he wants to. He does not care a farthing what any one thinks of him. He is the most utterly unapproachable, cynical, attractive creature imaginable. I have not a friend who has not tried her hand at him, and he is perfectly brutal in his methods with them, or used to be. He has almost retired into his shell in these last two years. It is perhaps your luck that you have come to live near him——"

"I did not find him attractive," I said, and then wondered if I were telling the truth.

Letitia leant back and laughed, but she did not continue the subject.

"I can only spare these two nights with you, pet," she announced, "just long enough to tell you what you must have done to this place to make it habitable, and then I must tear on to town. In all the many times I have stayed at Minton Dremont, I have never been over here—the Morleys were such impossible people. But you must do it up properly."

"There is no use your telling me anything, Letitia," I informed her. "You must use your clever way with Humphrey—when you make him think he has suggested what you want and that you are against it, he gives in sometimes. I have no influence with him."

Letitia kissed me lightly as she got up from her chair.

"Poor little Guinevere," she said. "It is quite time you were rescued." Then she asked in a different tone:

"How is Algernon?"

"You will see him to-morrow. He has not gone back to his school," I told her. "He goes to Eton in the autumn half."

"Children are sometimes a frightful bore. I'm so thankful Langthorpe is so devoted to his nephew. He has never regretted our having none. Algernon is too like Humphrey to be altogether a comfort."

"Yes," I allowed.

"I have noticed," she went on, "that when a woman is passionately in love, the child is the image of what she thinks the man is—or, if she is—as you were, Guinevere—unknowing and uncaring—the child is like the man with his worst qualities, if the man is a self-centred creature like Humphrey. Strong natures produce some definite thing. Hum-

phrey reproduced himself, you being practically a nonentity in the affair."

"Probably."

"Guinevere, you are not going to remain a nonentity in life always, are you?"

"I do not know," I said, and then something made me almost cry aloud. "Oh! if you knew, Letitia, how I want to live—before it is too late!"

She looked at me strangely. "The worst of you would be that you would take it too seriously, I fear! You could not frivol, Guinevere, and then you would make a *bêtise* and then we should have a family scandal."

But I controlled my momentary emotion and reassured her.

"I have still my sense of humor," I said, "which might help matters. Now, we ought to go and dress."

At dinner Letitia did her best to charm Humphrey, who was at his gayest. She parried his attacks so sharply that he could not dominate every one and every subject, as usual. She suggested that the house, being so old, we ought to have it done up by some one who really knew of the suitable things for it. But Humphrey said he intended to leave it as it is—an early Victorian coating over the rooms that his mother lived in, and the rest as cold and bare and ghostly as they had probably been since fifteen hundred and nine, when most of them were built.

My bedroom looks over the moat which comes under the windows at that side; it was a state room.

Humphrey has taken his mother's suite, as the fires do not smoke there. They are far away from me on the other side, a wing built on at a Georgian date. I am thankful to say it is now seven years since he has ever suggested being near to me. The house is not enormously large, only dark and queer and impracticable. There is no comfort—just tradition and grim darkness, and gloom.

I wish I might have new hangings for the great oak bed—the deep red velvet looks so funereal. I would have chosen another sleeping apartment myself, but that the view from here is so beautiful, when I go into the little round closet which is in the turret; and I can make it into a sort of retiring room, where I can fly to, away from the noise when Humphrey swears at the servants. He likes state, too, and thinks his wife ought to occupy "My Lady's Chamber." I sometimes wonder if I am afraid of ghosts. There are such queer sounds in the pannelling. I have read a number

of books lately which say that people leave their impress upon their surroundings, and some part of their spirit comes back to their earthly abodes if they have been wicked and wretched, and this affects the dwellers who now occupy them. All the house is full of bloodshed and crime and cruelty. There cannot be any pleasant influence connected with it. Violent partings of lovers—betrayed friends—and the Bohuns were Roundheads, too, and in this very room tortured a Cavalier who adored the wife of that Bohun whose portrait hangs over the chimney-piece in the drawing-room. It seems they have periodically liked the idea of being christened Humphrey, though where the connection comes in with the original Humphrey de Bohun I have never heard. Algernon was called Humphrey Algernon, the latter name after my father. He dislikes his new home, Redwood Moat, except that there are such numbers of rats and he has two good terriers. I wish, I wish I could love Algernon as much as I want to. It sounds so ideal—a beautiful little son born when the mother was only seventeen,—he ought to have been such a plaything for her, unhappy and frightened and cowed as she was then. But she was too young to understand any maternal instincts; he was a terror to her in case anything happened to him. Can that Guinevere of those old days be really me? And then in India I was always too ill, and when he and I came back Algernon was already four years old. Oh, those years at Bath with him and his stern Bohun aunts. There was no chance of becoming friendly. Araminta spoilt him and Lady Crumford punished him, and would have punished me if she had dared.

Humphrey's instincts seemed to show themselves almost immediately in Algernon. He is as like him in character as he is in face. Suspicious, vindictive, and arrogant. He loves me, I think, as much as he can love any one, but I never know when he will turn round and hurt me in the middle of a caress. I have tried my hardest to lead him by love and understanding, but the long absences—he has been at the school Humphrey selected for him since he was eight—undermine my influence, until now at thirteen we have very little of common interest except the dogs. I believe he is not popular at his school, except that he is such a good cricketer.

I am only just beginning to realize that of course all these circumstances in my life which make it so dreary must be in some way caused by my own fault. But it is very difficult, no matter what the natural character, to be able to rise

superior to events if a woman has been married so young to such a man as Humphrey, and kept dependent always, with rarely five pounds to call her own.

I ought to try and be ordinary and take everything as I appear to do on the surface. But something in me, especially in the springtime, cries aloud in a fierce rebellion at the waste of it all—the waste of the years—of youth—the anguish of loneliness—the barren littleness of my life. This obsession is upon me to-night; the scents of the fresh wet earth come up from the field beyond the moat. A bird is chirping softly, not yet asleep. I am quivering with I know not what. Night, come and comfort me—enfold me in your dark wings, and let me sleep.

CHAPTER II

LETITIA breakfasted in her room. I have never been allowed to do that. Punctuality at meals is one of Humphrey's fads, and he is generally very cross behind the paper at the other end of the table. He does not mean to be unkind to me. He often tries to give me pleasures, but they must be as he likes, not as I like. I am not consulted about anything. If I had not been so young and so frightened in the beginning, it might have been all different; or if I had cared for him in the least, perhaps I could have acquired some kind of influence. But the hopelessness of the outlook has made me let everything drift.

Letitia leads a life of perfect freedom. Her husband, Lord Langthorpe, is an easy-going creature, and they do not interfere with one another. Letitia says after the first year or two if you order a man's house well, and invariably play the part of a brilliant figurehead, that is all which should be required of you, and that both men and women should be free to express their individuality as they please. She has had a number of well-conducted flirtations, all arranged with perfect common sense, and no scandal. She says they are necessary to the development of the brain of a clever woman. It is quite impossible to understand life if you live forever outside the door of its mainspring.

I do not know anything about love. I have imagined it often—but of the reality I am as ignorant as I was at seventeen.

"Guinevere" Letitia said suddenly, in the middle of her discourse, "you sit there looking at me with your great gray eyes. What are you thinking about? Tell me, you odd thing."

"I am wondering what you would have done if you had been married, at not quite seventeen, to Humphrey."

This startled her.

"We should have had awful rows, of course, and then I suppose he would have broken my spirit, or I should have worn away his; but you are just where you were, and the days are passing."

At lunch she asked casually if we would not send over and suggest Sir Hugh Dremont's dining with us this evening. She wanted to see him awfully; she had not done so for three months, and it was such a chance, as he so seldom went into society now.

I did not say anything, so Humphrey agreed, much to my surprise, and told me to write him a note, which I did.

When the answer, accepting, came back, Letitia was up helping me to arrange my tiny turret sitting-room. There is a small winding stairway from it up to the battlemented tower-top, and down to the same room on the floor below, and then again to the ground floor and lower to the dungeon, while on the drawing-room level the little place had been turned into a library, completely lined with books which no one has read for years; but on my floor it had never been touched, since the Roundheads' time, and has still the stiff oak furniture in it, a table and two chairs. There are three narrow casements looking north, east and west, and a grim, open fireplace.

"You could make this delightful," Letitia said. "Either have it panelled or hang tapestry over these rough stone walls, and think how you can escape down the staircase and into the garden without passing the household! A most useful place, I call it," and there was a laugh in her eye. "We must bring Sir Hugh up here this evening, and show it to him, and get his opinion. He knows about every style and date."

"Humphrey probably won't allow any change to be made, but do try," I said, "though even if one got into the garden it is walled all round, with only one little door into the stable yard for the gardeners to come in by, and there is still the moat to pass. The only open way to the outer world is through the great iron gates into the courtyard and over the drawbridge, or through the servants' quarters, and across the bridge."

"It is certainly a fortress," Letitia said.

Sir Hugh Dremont was five minutes late for dinner, and Humphrey stood before the fire with his watch in his hand. The fire was lit because it is a cold and rainy night, and as I write now after midnight up in my gloomy room, I can

hear the wind howling down the turret chimneys, and the rain beating against the window panes.

If Letitia had not also been late I am sure Humphrey would have expressed his impatience aloud. He fortunately stands in some awe of Letitia.

Sir Hugh talked so easily it made things quite pleasant, and when my sister did come down, radiant as a June rose, we were almost gay. I did not speak much. I never do when any one else will, and our guest did not seem to be taking the slightest interest in me.

He looks distinctly attractive in evening dress. He is like some old portrait, and not a modern person.

After dinner Letitia sat down upon the only comfortable sofa in the drawing-room, and insensibly drew him to her, and Humphrey, as is his wont when no great effort is required of him, fell asleep in his huge arm-chair, so I went to the piano and began to play. I let my fingers stray from one thing to another, without stopping. I do this almost every night, while my husband dozes; it is my hour of peace and freedom and comfort; it seems as though my soul escapes from its prison house, and mounts toward high heaven, upon the wings of sound. The two hushed their voices, but did not stop speaking at first. I was glad of that; they had forgotten me, and I them.

There was some kind of exquisite sorrow upon me tonight. I was not unhappy, only strangely, tenderly moved, and perhaps it spoke through my playing.

Gradually the noise of their voices became less and less in the room, and finally there was silence, except for the wailing notes which came from my touch. I happened to be playing the Rain prelude, and it sobbed out what I was feeling—in a passionate protest against I knew not what. When I had finished I let my hands fall into my lap. I was far away, and Sir Hugh's voice startled me, and out of the shadows I saw that he had come forward, and was leaning upon the end of the piano.

"You have given us great pleasure," he said, and Letitia rose from the sofa, too.

"Guinevere is a witch," she laughed softly, "and now she has let you see a real piece of her magic, Hugh."

I froze at once, as is my stupid way, and said I was glad I had pleased him, in a commonplace voice, and then Letitia suggested we should go and see the turret room.

"Come," she whispered playfully. "We three must creep away from the sleeping ogre of the castle, who would never

permit us to show a stranger the road to his treasure chamber," and she put out her white hand and took Sir Hugh's, and drew him stealthily into the little library, which was lit with only one lamp. Letitia is so charming a person, her every action is full of grace, and no one would ever think she was nearly forty-one years old.

There was no light whatever in the narrow winding staircase, which we gained by the book-disguised door, and as I led the way, Sir Hugh put out his strong, smooth left hand and took mine. There was something in the firm grasp which suddenly affected me strangely, a peculiar thrill ran through me, a sensation that I have never felt before.

"You must guide us," he said while he pulled Letitia up the stairs, and so we arrived at the entrance of the little shrine.

Only the dim light from my bedroom came through from beyond. There is no electric light installed as yet, and I went forward to bring in the lamp, but they followed me.

"Did you ever see such a ghostly place for a young woman to sleep in all alone," Letitia exclaimed, struck with the picture of it at night, which she had not yet seen. "I should hate this black oak and those heavy red velvet curtains. I am thankful to say I am in a more modern part of the house."

"I have never been up here before," Sir Hugh said. "I have always heard of this room, though. 'The Lady Margaret's Chamber' it is called, is it not? You know we people with more modern abodes take a deep interest in every atom of Redwood Moat. It is a kind of respectable relic to have in the county—but this room does not look a suitable surrounding for so fragile and dainty a lady as you, Mrs. Bohun!"

"It is far away from every one, that is why I like it," I answered, and I moved back into the turret, carrying a lamp.

Here Letitia began asking Sir Hugh's advice. "Ought we to have tapestry or panelling, or leave it quite plain?"

He mused for a minute, as though he were balancing things.

"I think you must leave it as it is," he said at last, "unless the tapestry could be very good, and it is so difficult to find."

"I am glad that is your conclusion," I answered him, "because I am as likely to get panelling as tapestry—and the moon as either."

"Guinevere, if you only knew how to manage Humphrey!"

my sister interrupted. "I would get anything I wanted out of him."

"I am not clever," I said, "and the price might make the thing distasteful."

Letitia went back to my bedroom for an instant and surveyed the room from the door critically. I had put the lamp on the table, and stood back in the shadow, and Sir Hugh said to me in a low voice, "You told me yesterday you hated all old things, and yet you choose this, the most ancient part of the house, for your own suite. Are you not a contradiction?"

"It may be a choice of evils," I returned. "I did not say I cared for these gloomy rooms."

The interest deepened in his eyes, and he was just going to say something, and then he checked himself. I do not know why.

Letitia at this moment had the intelligence to remember that Humphrey might wake, and might possibly be annoyed at our absence, so she started for the door, and then called airily:

"Come, we must go down again and brave the depths."

Sir Hugh followed her, and I propped open the door, leaving the lamp. The faint rays were not, however, sufficient to light beyond the first turn of the turret steps, and we were in pitch darkness, when we all reached the next floor. I had kept beyond the touch of Sir Hugh's hand, though he turned and waited for me. I was disturbed, which was very foolish of me.

Letitia, who was first, fumbled at the ctach of the little library door, but failed to open it, and in the few seconds in the black darkness I could feel that Sir Hugh came nearer to me. There was that indescribable sense of propinquity, it seemed as if I felt his being absorb me—this stranger with whom I had only exchanged a few ordinary sentences. A trembling seized me, and now as I sit here in the gloomy panelled room, with the light of the lamp coming from under the shade in a clear-cut path, I analyze everything as is my wont. One gets into foolish habits living as I do away from the world, and with every real feeling turned inward, and hidden from one's daily companions. What was that unknown emotion which came to me in the dark?

When Letitia did finally open the door and the light from the little library blazed onto our faces, Sir Hugh's looked the same, but my sister exclaimed:

"How pale you are, Guinevere! Did you see a ghost as

we came down the stairs?" And I answered: "Yes—I did."

Humphrey was still asleep, and I sat down to the piano again and crashed a loud chord that he might wake naturally, and so would not be unusually ill-tempered at being caught napping. Sir Hugh raised an eyebrow, and there was a whimsical expression in his face, as though he had taken in the meaning of the scene. It hurt me. I never let any one see the barrenness of my life, or pity me. I am considered a stupid and disagreeable woman generally, but not an unhappy one.

"Mrs. Bohun! Oh! A person quite impossible to get on with," as one of the ladies in India was heard to say.

Humphrey woke and glanced round furtively. I watched him, but seeing Letitia talking to our guest, he got up, gave himself the air of a person who has never slept at all, and joined them.

"As I was saying—" he remarked, and went on with the subject they had been discussing before he dozed. Sir Hugh turned and met my eye, and there was such an exquisite twinkle in his I had to look down at once—I could not enjoy with any one a ridiculous aspect of my husband.

Then Sir Hugh said it was awfully late, and he must be going, and Humphrey protested it could not be more than half-past nine o'clock, as we had only just come up from dinner; then he saw by the clock that it was quarter to eleven, and he frowned. So Sir Hugh made his adieus with a warm handshake for Letitia. So glad he had been to see her again. They are evidently most intimate friends.

I came last of all.

"Good night, Mrs. Bohun," he said, and he looked so strangely into my eyes. "Your husband has promised that you will both come over and dine with me next week. I shall be having a few people, but I hope you will let me come and see you before then?"

I said I should be glad, and he went. And then Letitia came up into my room with me, and sat down by the wood fire.

"Guinevere," she said, "Humphrey is failing—he is growing into an old man, my dear. What age is he now, I can't remember?"

"He is sixty-one—he will be sixty-two in the autumn."

"He was such a splendid dasher twenty years ago, when I first knew him—but of course it is ridiculous now when one thinks of you—you look about twenty, and a girl at that."

"Well! I don't much know what being married is—or life—or love—or anything which makes a woman. I expect I look like an old maid!" and I tried to smile.

"You look as if you would have a thrillingly interesting story, my little sister—I shall return and see how you are getting on again soon—only don't fall in love with Sir Hugh Dremont—Mrs. Dalison is coming to his party for the races next week."

"Who is Mrs. Dalison?" I asked, unpleasantly interested. I do not know why.

"A—friend—of his," Letitia said, and then she kissed me lightly and went off to bed.

CHAPTER III

THE races at Redwood are very late this year. They have them usually in Easter week, but a great supporter of the hunt died just then, and they were postponed until May 3. They will be the same, I expect, as what I am accustomed to in regimental races. I suppose they are amusing if you know all the horses. Humphrey used actually to ride in steeplechases when we were first married, but he has not done so for more than ten years. They are a great excitement to Algernon, who is mad about horses. He rides wonderfully well, my tall son, and his great pleasure is to give me hints upon the subject.

"You'll never really make a horsewoman, mother," he often tells me. "You look extremely decent on a gee because you aren't fat, but you have no go about you. I believe you'd much rather jog along on your quiet old Jenny Wren than come with father and me, even if he'd let you hunt."

And I am afraid this is true. Long ago I thought I should adore hunting, but Humphrey would not hear of it; women were in the way in the field, he said. So I was early discouraged; and then in India and at Bath I had not the chance. But I do love to jog along on my dear Jenny Wren; she is a bright bay thoroughbred, with a perfect mouth and perfect manners.

Humphrey does not mind what he spends upon horses, and Algernon has always had the best of ponies. Anything to do with hunting and riding they are at one about, but on most other subjects there are jars. Algernon is afraid of his father, and no wonder.

Humphrey intends him to be a soldier, and he rather likes the idea of going into the old regiment. Humphrey was such a very great personage in it, the hero of a hundred fights—in love and war.

Algernon is really a splendid specimen for thirteen, and there is not a touch in him of me except that his eyes are gray; Humphrey's are brown. Algernon is going to be allowed to go to the races, and is longing for the time when he may ride in them himself.

I have a great big short-furred, blue Russian cat—his name is Petrov. He has a passionate affection for me, and all the dogs are his friends, but Algernon teases him and Petrov hates him—I suppose it is natural for boys to tease cats. I have only had him a few months, and he hisses when he sees Algernon. I have noticed this trait in my child about many things; he is not very considerate to animals, and, just like Humphrey, he lashes out furiously when they annoy him.

I have tried to influence him to be different, and he is always very sorry and promises he won't do the same again, but he always forgets—the headstrong nature in him seems to assert itself beyond everything. I wonder what they will do with him at Eton. My brother Bob was there. Bob was such a darling. He died of scarlet fever when he was in the Eleven, the week before the match; I was fourteen then, and it was the greatest sorrow of my life. I believe if he had lived he would never have let Letitia and my father marry me to Humphrey. I do not know why I am writing down all these stupid things to-day, just as if I were recounting a story. I seem to be so restless ever since Letitia was here.

It is settled that we dine at Minton Dremont on the race night. They are going to dance after dinner. Sir Hugh has a large party; he will take them to the hunt ball on the Friday. Letitia said, although nothing would drag him to a ball in London, he always plays his part as a country gentleman; when there are any functions on he must attend. He lives nearly all the year now at Minton Dremont, though he has a very valuable mining and town property up in the north.

Minton Dremont is a splendid place, but not very old. It was built in George the Third's time; the really ancient house was pulled down then.

The neighborhood think it is a dreadful pity Sir Hugh is not married, because his cousin, who comes after him, is a wretched, sickly creature, with three consumptive sons. I wonder why he does not marry. Letitia says he could have had any woman in England that he wished—he is so rich, and has such a prestige. Who is this Mrs. Dalison, I wonder, and why did Letitia speak about her in that tone of voice?

I hate to think ugly, sordid things, such as Humphrey always insinuates, about people, but I suppose it is natural for much-run-after bachelors to have some safe consolation.

I cannot understand what is the matter with me lately, I do not seem to be able to settle to anything. I am sitting now in my little turret room, looking out of the west window; my writing-pad is on my knee, and the sun is getting low. I have to drive at three o'clock every day because the victoria horses have to be exercised—Humphrey will not hear of a motor—and I came in at tea-time—that duty done—and have been up here ever since. I think I will go for a ride. My maid will be disgusted at having to get me changed again, but Algernon will be enchanted; he shall come with me, and we will have a gallop over the turf.

. . . . . .

Just as we were turning back from the lane into Corlston Chase we overtook a man in front of us—it proved to be Sir Hugh Dremont.

I was out on my eternal drive the day he came to call after he dined, and I have not seen him since that night. He was riding such an exquisite black horse, and he greeted us with friendly pleasure.

"This is my son Algernon," I said; and Algernon, who is so coached by his father to understand what being "well turned out" means in man or horse, gave Sir Hugh an approving glance.

"Is it not a divine evening," the owner of the chase where we were riding said, and we soon were chatting easily—or at least he and Algernon were. The boy is not at all shy, and likes to converse with every one. They spoke of horses, of course, and the races, and Algernon was so proud to show the paces of his pony. He used all kinds of grand technical terms about it, and looked so flushed and handsome—I would love to kiss and pet him often, but he hates all caresses. "A horrid bore," I am sorry to say he calls them when sometimes the temptation overcomes me to kiss his curls!

At last he asked if he might canter on and rejoin us at the park gate; he was tired of going so slowly, and Sir Hugh said he did not mean to get out of a trot so that his beautiful black horse should come in cool. Whether animals are hot or cold never matters to either Humphrey or Algernon.

When we were alone I felt the same peculiar agitation I had felt on the stairs, but not so strongly, of course, in

the light and open air. I tried to talk naturally about trivial things, but he hardly seemed to be listening; and at last he said:

"What do you really do with yourself through the days? You are not interested in any of the avocations we have been exchanging commonplaces about."

"I read and think," I answered shyly. It seemed as if he had torn off my mask.

"Are they sad thoughts?" he asked, and then we had this conversation:

"I try that they should not be—the world is so fair in the springtime."

"But they are—I knew it immediately. You have a strange, pale, quiet face. Forgive me if I seem presuming to talk to you like this when we do not know each other at all, but you interested me so the other evening."

"Did I—why?"

"There is something mysterious about you. Your manner is so stiff and cold, and you are so still, and then—you played like that—God! how it made me feel."

"One must have some outlet."

"Yes," he said, and he bent low on the glossy black neck. "The music took me back to youth and belief and other pleasant things at first, and then it stirred something which I thought could never wake again. I cannot imagine anything which could give me greater pleasure than to have you to play to me—alone in the room—play for me only."

"I will some day—perhaps," I said quite softly. The picture he had conjured up seemed most pleasant—he and I, with just the music to talk for us. And then I smiled bitterly. These things were not for me; Humphrey would never allow Sir Hugh to come and see me, and sit there while I played. It is expressly forbidden me ever to entertain a man alone. While we traveled about Humphrey was always with me in the afternoons, and then came these last six months again at Bath, and his terrible jealousy was too well known in the station in India for any one to have dared to arouse it.

"Why do you smile like that?" Sir Hugh asked. "I said once before you were a contradiction—and I still think it."

I looked away to the budding trees; the sun had almost set, a pink glow was over everything. A fresh, delicious scent of spring things arose from the earth, the birds chirped blithely—and a sudden stab of pain came to my heart, and, if I had allowed them, my eyes would have filled with tears;

but I blinked these back as they gathered, then Sir Hugh put his hand out on the pommel of my saddle, and, bending, looked into my face.

"Shall we be friends?" he said, his attractive voice with a deep note in it. "After a while I should grow to know—the contradictions—and what they expressed or concealed. I like to study that which is difficult and not for the reading of all the world."

"I cannot have any friends," I faltered. "Do not speak to me like that—please, Sir Hugh."

We were silent then for the next hundred yards or so—and what a thing wrought with meaning a silence can be! It cannot happen with two casual strangers, or even two acquaintances; it suggests intimacy, it suggests—what there can never be between Sir Hugh Dremont and me. At the end of it he let his black horse come close to Jenny Wren again; and he smiled so kindly—all the stern cynicism which stamps his face melted away as he spoke.

"Well, I will not ask anything, then. We will just drift—and enjoy the springtime, and the chances we shall ever get like this. Tell me about the boy—he is not like you."

So we talked of Algernon and my hopes for him, and my fears; and I forgot my grim guard over myself, and, I am afraid, let him see some of the real me.

I am sure he is good and true underneath, and oh! I wish—I wish we might be friends; but it would not do. Humphrey would never allow it, and there would only be rows.

"Thank you," Sir Hugh said, as we came to our park gate. "Remember, we have made no bargains; you are going to leave things to chance—and me."

Then Jenny Wren craned her neck and sniffed some plant in the hedge, and I gathered my reins and did not reply.

Algernon came up at full gallop a second or two later, with a laugh and a "Tally ho," and Sir Hugh held the gate for us to pass; and we cantered home across the turf—but once I looked back and saw him standing motionless, the black horse and his rider making a sharp silhouette against the evening sky.

Humphrey was not very pleased when we got to the house. He was waiting in the hall. Such freaks, suddenly to go out so late like this, should be discouraged! People should give orders in the morning for what they intended to do in the day. He strutted and fumed, and Algernon made a face at him while his back was turned; and I felt so strange and ex-

ited that I laughed—which I should not have done, of course —and then my husband's rage burst forth, and my son ran rom the room.

When the abuse of me was over, I crept up to my turret hamber, and for some minutes did not ring for my maid. Humphrey and his temper seemed a long way off. The scold- ng had not hurt and cowed me as it used to do—why? I went in to the little shrine and looked from the east window, nd there far in the distance I saw some tall chimneys through he giant trees of the park of Minton Dremont, and above verything a flag on the flagstaff waved.

The rooks were caw-cawing as they flew homeward, and he eastern sky was a pale saffron fading to violet on the orizon, while the crimson glow showed high above from he glory of the west. How can human beings stir them- elves with angry passions when God made the world so fair?

Something of comfort seemed to have come to my heart, nd I could go back and face the ordeal of a *tête-à-tête* inner with my irate lord.

He was ashamed of his outburst, as usual, and it made him ullen until we had finished the fish. He is rather proud in is way, and seldom insults me before the servants; but very one in the house trembles at him, and in the stables, oo. Our butler had been with Humphrey as valet for many ears before we came here, and he was promoted, and he knows all the signs of the times. He takes a deep interest in us as a family, and, I think, is particularly attached to me. He generally offers his master a glass of liqueur brandy upon one excuse or another before the legitimate time for such things has come if he observes any storm signals. Hart- ington is his name, and I am sure that his tact and sympathy have often saved me from greater unpleasantness than I have actually suffered. To-night the brandy came with an iced entrée that the new *chef* was trying, and it had a soothing effect.

"It looks as if it would keep fine for the races on Wednes- day," my husband said, after the long, ominous silence. "Next year we must have a party for them when I've got the place shipshape. It is very friendly of Hugh Dremont to have asked us to join him for lunch."

"Yes," I answered meekly. "But I suppose in any case you will send over the coach to watch the races from. We could hardly take up so much room on Sir Hugh's; he will have his own party to fill it."

"My phaeton will be quite enough for you and me and the

boy," and Humphrey frowned. "I am not likely to bore people with my family."

"No," I said.

Then he talked on about the neighborhood and the few people that were left whom he had known in his young days. He made conversation, and told me some of his best stories in his inimitable raconteur's style. He must have been so amusing when he was younger, and did not repeat the same ones over and over again. I laughed in the places I ought to; and when the servants had finally left the room and I rose to light the match for his cigar—a nightly duty—he put out his hand and touched my hand.

"You look rather pale, Guinevere, these last few days," he remarked. "What is it, little girl?"

"Nothing," I answered quietly, and a lump grew in my throat, "only the house seems very dark, after Italy last year—but I shall get accustomed to it presently, no doubt."

Humphrey pushed my hand away.

"What d——d nonsense women talk," he growled. "The house has been good enough for me and mine these last four hundred years, and I'll trouble you to find it so—young Mistress Bohun."

"I will try," I answered, and got away up to the drawing-room as soon as I could; I was playing the piano when Humphrey joined me and went to sleep in his chair.

And the music throbbed aloud all the things which were in my heart until there grew a mist of tears in my eyes; and out of the shadows beyond the lamp I seemed to see the face of Sir Hugh Dremont.

CHAPTER IV

All the way as we drove to the races I was filled with one stupid desire—to see this Mrs. Dalison Letitia had spoken of. She must, of course, be very clever and attractive, or Sir Hugh would not have her for a—friend. When I thought of that, the peace and calm and pleasure of the memory of our evening ride seemed to become less, and some jar entered into the vision of it. Since he had his own—friend, why should he wish to be friends with me? And then I reflected at the underlying meaning there had been in my sister's words, and that the signification of "friend" was very different when applied to me. Humphrey is suspicious about every one's relations with each other. I have heard imputations insinuated about almost every person we ever knew. It frightened and filled me with indignation in the first years, but now I have grown accustomed to it, and indifferent to everything. There is no use taking people's part or defending them. I have always tried to remain uninfluenced and allow my own judgment alone to direct me. I believe reading so much of the thoughts of the noble writers of the ages and living so far away from human beings' companionship has helped me to take a broad view. It always seems to me that one should live and let live, and leave everything between the man or woman and God, without outsiders interfering.

Perhaps it is only gossip that Mrs. Dalison is Sir Hugh's—friend.

The race day was gloriously fine and warm, and when we got on to the course and backed the phaeton into its allotted place it proved to be next the Minton Dremont coach. Sir Hugh had another vehicle beside the coach, a large brake. And all his party had arrived and were climbing up and down. There seemed to be a number of them, and at least

six or seven women—four of them fairly young and good-looking, and all beautifully dressed. I could not decide which could be Mrs. Dalison. Sir Hugh himself was away for the moment, in the paddock, I suppose, looking at his horses.

Humphrey shines at this sort of entertainments; he is gallant and genial, and sufficiently *entreprenant* in his remarks for ladies always to find him delightful. He soon mounted the coach and spoke to those he knew, leaving Algernon and me alone.

"Can't we go to the paddock, Mother?" my son said impatiently; "the first race will soon begin." But I did not dare—until one of the neighbors came to talk and asked us to go with him.

Humphrey turned a surprised glance from his superior perch as he saw us walk off, but I did not care.

Sir Hugh was standing with two ladies. What a huge party he must have, was the thought which struck me; and then, that one of these women must certainly be Mrs. Dalison—but which? The taller was a doll-faced person, a good deal painted, and not vivacious-looking, but perfectly dressed in the kind of way that requires skill not to look vulgar—she just did not look that. I dismissed her at once. Sir Hugh would never waste himself upon any one so evidently brainless. The other woman was a sportswoman; one could see it by the keen interest she was taking in the hunters as they were being walked round. She was neat and very attractive—this, of course, was she. But I was all wrong, for Sir Hugh came up with them both the moment he caught sight of us, and introduced them in a friendly way, and the painted one was Mrs. Dalison, after all; the other, Lady Hilda Flint.

Mrs. Dalison looked bored and hardly spoke, and we only exchanged the fewest words that politeness prescribes. They had neither of them the air of wishing to make the acquaintance of their host's country friends.

"Let us go back to the coach now, Hugh," Mrs. Dalison said; but Sir Hugh was talking to Algernon, and she had to repeat it twice before he would attend.

His manner was so perfectly casual, just as on the first day he came to call; it chilled me, and I became stiff at once, while I turned to old Major Milton, who had brought us to the paddock, and pretended to be interested in the horses and their riders beginning to mount.

Then we strolled back to the phaeton and climbed up to watch the first race.

Mrs. Dalison put her hand excitedly on Sir Hugh's arm, I suppose to steady herself—but he took no extra notice of her. One could see the race interested him a great deal more for the moment.

When it was over, and he had rushed to the paddock again to see his horse, which one of the young men staying with him had been riding, and which came in second, Humphrey brought up some of the men of the party and introduced them to me; and then Sir Hugh returned and took us to luncheon, laid out on a trestled table behind his coach.

I felt extremely depressed, I cannot say why—though I tried to talk to whoever spoke to me.

Our host was gay and agreeable, and chaffed with his party, and they all seemed so friendly and pleasant. I suppose, if you have never had any one watching you jealously, you can be natural and merry like that when you go out. The same thing went on the whole afternoon—walks to the paddock and back, climbing up to look at the races, and then tea. Humphrey introduced me to a number of his old country friends, as it was our first appearance, and I tried to behave as he would wish, but an utter discouragement was upon me. I had a longing to be young and gay upon the coach-top. There was one girl who had a merry, friendly face—I liked her; and she called to me once and asked me to come and sit beside her while the rest were away—and Sir Hugh, returning just then, made me go.

As he helped me onto the coach he said, with one of his eyebrows up in that whimsical, questioning way he has:

"How all this sort of thing bores you, does it not, Mrs. Bohun?"

"No," I answered, "I am much amused."

He laughed and went off when I was safe on the top beside Miss St. Clair.

She had the most assured manner, and was so breezy and agreeable. Any one would have thought that she was the married woman and I was the girl. She chattered on, giving me unconscious glimpses of the world in general, and the party at Minton Dremont in particular.

They were fairly harmonious, it appeared; only Mrs. Dalison, whom she confided to me she did not like, was inclined to give herself airs of proprietorship about Sir Hugh.

"It is perfectly ridiculous of her," Miss St. Clair said. "Any one can see Sir Hugh is bored to death with her—he

has been for the last six months, only she will hang on; it has been talked about for a year."

"That is a very long time for an affair to last, is it not?" I asked. "A year! I live so out of the world, I do not know about these interesting things."

"Yes—it is," agreed Miss St. Clair. "Personally, I don't believe there is anything in it, or ever was—it is just Sir Hugh is such a fearful centre of interest for every one that he cannot speak to a woman without being put down at once as her lover. Ada Marjoribanks, who is so funny and apt, says that is why he always chooses something striking and flashy like Mrs. Dalison to amuse himself with, whenever he gets a recrudescence of worldly desires—then it is too obvious to be serious, or to grow into a tie."

Oh, how common and degrading it all seemed to me!—which, of course, was very foolish and old-fashioned of me. But, somehow, the day was tarnished and spoilt, and I was glad when we prepared to go home.

"Mind you are ready in time to start for dinner," Humphrey said in the hall as I went up to my room. "I mean to leave at ten minutes past eight."

And now I have got to think about dressing and, afterward, the dance. I feel no desire to go—a sense of weariness with everything is overcoming me. I wonder if this room is really haunted by that unhappy Lady Margaret, who loved the Cavalier. Certainly something gloomy and sad appears to be always round me since we have been at Redwood Moat. However, Algernon has been perfectly happy to-day, so that is something. His handsome, excited face all the time has been the admiration of every one. Humphrey is extremely proud of him and likes to show him to the neighborhood. I can see that. I do not think the way he encourages his taste for races and horses can be very good for the child. If he takes an inordinate pleasure in these things later on, Humphrey will be very angry, probably, and will have no one to blame but himself. I said this to him only this morning, before we started, but he told me I was a fool, as usual. How could a young woman like me know anything about such things! I was to leave the bringing-up of his son in his own hands. So what can I do?

. . . . . .

It is half-past two o'clock, and we are back from our evening at Minton Dremont. It seemed more than ever like a prison fortress to return here after the light and brightness of that stately house. I had not been in it before. It is

full of exquisite things: pictures and marvelous furniture and tapestries and collections of china and miniatures, and all sorts of *objets d'art*. They have always been such prosperous people, the Dremonts, with that rich property in the north, and Sir Hugh's mother was an heiress upon her own account.

I always think a bachelor's house is better done than any other, and certainly this one is perfection.

Sir Hugh looks extraordinarily distinguished and old-world in his evening hunt coat, just as if he had walked out of his great-grandfather's picture-frame—a late portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence; and as a host he has immense charm. No wonder these pretty women of society purr round him and cajole him all the time. It was quite amusing before dinner to watch them. We were ridiculously early, of course. They were like a lot of houris in a harem, each vying with the other for the post of favorite—and deep in Sir Hugh's dark-blue cynical eyes there was always a twinkle. He chaffs with them in a way that to me is on the verge of insolence—but they seem enchanted, so I suppose it is only my silly idea.

I sat two off him at dinner, which we had at round tables. Mrs. Dalison was in the same place on the other side, and an important duchess and a countess were at his right and left hands. The Duchess has a daughter here, and her niece, Miss St. Clair—but the Countess is looking at him for herself; she is a widow and very pretty, though quite forty years old. The man who took me in was most agreeable—when the Duchess would let me have him! She turned to him automatically whenever Sir Hugh addressed his other neighbor, whether mine happened to be talking to me or no. Manners, in the world, are not at all what one would expect, evidently. But I dare say she thought me a local bore and an interloper at their party.

Sir Hugh smiled at me once or twice—but we exchanged no word.

Mrs. Dalison was most daringly dressed, and has wonderful shoulders; but without her hat one can see her hair is dyed, there is a dark shadow at the roots. Why should I write this? It is spiteful of me, because how can it matter to me what she is or has?

She whispered to the man who had taken her in when I saw he was asking her who I was, and I felt she was saying, "Poor Hugh has to entertain his country neighbors."

After dinner in the great drawing-room—all a queer, greenish panelling and gilt with wonderful Louis XV tapes-

try—we grouped about on the stiff sofas. And every one smoked and chatted to their friends; and Miss St. Clair sat down again by me, until the Duchess called her to fetch something from her room—and I was left alone.

"What a beautiful thing your son is, Mrs. Bohun," one woman said to me. "Only, it looks absurd for you to have a boy of fourteen or fifteen!"

"Algernon is thirteen," I said. "He is going to Eton in the autumn—but he is tall, isn't he?"

"Age is so deceptive," Mrs. Dalison joined in, with a slight lisp, between her cigarette puffs. "My Phyllis is a mere child, too, though she is as tall as I am."

"Phyllis is certainly nineteen," the first woman whispered in my ear, with a malicious little laugh; and then she said, "Claire, darling, that frock was too ducky you had to-day. Do you always go to that wonderfully cheap little woman?"

And Mrs. Dalison answered that she did, blandly, with a gleam in her big hazel eyes. Then they talked a little of politics, and much of some new book upon a sex problem—and they were all sweetly familiar and agreeable to each other, and gave me the impression they would willingly cut each other's throats; and at last the men came in, and the few extra guests for the dance began to arrive, and we went into the saloon, which had been cleared. Sir Hugh did not pay more attention to Mrs. Dalison than to any of the rest; and after the second or third dance he came up to me.

"Come and have a turn, Mrs. Bohun, will you?" he asked; and we began to waltz.

He does not dance particularly well, and we stopped by a door—and he led the way into a small sitting-room down the corridor. I had not seen it before.

"We can sit here and talk," he said, and indicated a comfortable blue-silk sofa for me to sink into; then he placed himself by my side.

"You look more perplexing than ever to-day, you know," and he leaned forward and gazed at me. "At the races there was a glint of contempt in those queer gray eyes. What was passing in the soul of the lady?"

"A number of things," I said.

"Tell me of them."

"Why should I?"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"There is no reason— I made a request——"

"You were much too busy to be aware of what I was or was not doing. How could you see anything in my eyes?"

He laughed softly, and it irritated me. I felt I was not going to be added to the list of his pastimes, like the Mrs. Dalisons of his world. I felt the pink coming into my cheeks.

"You take life too seriously," he protested gently. "The social world is a sordid, mean, hateful place, if you view it open-eyed. You should glance at it, and laugh and make a jest of it. There are so many parts of God's old earth that make up for the blight man has laid upon some of it."

"Yes," I said, and felt a fool for my irritation. "But it is difficult for me to laugh—I always want to, but I have no one to laugh with."

"Mariana in the Moated Grange," he whispered—and then, "Why were you christened Guinevere?"

"It is silly, isn't it?" I answered, "and very unkind to give babies such appellations without their leave. Nothing more unlike Arthur's Queen could be than I am. She was fair and stately and capricious—don't you think so? I do not like her character much, do you?"

"All women are capricious—nineteenths, at least—and you never know where you are with them. Any of them would give a man away to prove to other women that he was her lover."

"And the same woman would shield him if he committed a fraud—and almost be hanged in his stead were he accused of murder," I retorted.

"Yes—they are a mass of contradictions; the only way to take them is at their own valuation—never at your own. In that way you can surround yourself with a bouquet of different flowers whose perfume is as sweet as it is transient."

"Poor flowers!" I said, and I glanced through the door at the stream of them, who were coming to sit down in the corridor after the waltz.

His eyes followed mine, and he laughed—put his head back, and laughed; and suddenly I seemed to understand exactly how much they all mattered to him, and for no explainable reason a new lightness grew in my heart.

"When we know one another better," he said, with a note that might have been tenderness in his voice, only that is ridiculous, "I will tell you just what I thought of you the first day I came to call—the unconscious picture you made there on the step-ladder—and then afterwards—and I will make a confession, too, which will shock and disgust you."

"Must you wait until you know me better?" I asked. "I am curious," and I tried to speak lightly.

He looked at me for a second as though he were coming to a decision, and then he said, quite low, "No, I will tell you now. Do you remember the night when we stood in the dark—outside the door of the little library?"

"Yes"; and I felt a catch in my breath.

"Well, I was overcome with an insane desire to fold you in my arms and kiss you. You had looked so fragile and white and young, all alone up in that grim room. There, I have told you. Are you angry with me?"

I could not speak for a moment. I was filled with the remembrance of my own feelings upon that occasion—the unaccountable trembling and emotion. Is there something in influences coming from one to another, after all?

"Are you angry?" Sir Hugh asked again, now with anxiety in his voice.

"No," I said, and I tried to look at him calmly. "Humphrey—my husband—says a man always feels that sort of thing when he is near any woman."

"That is not true." He was almost indignant. "Such a man must be a pure sensualist. But I had rather you were angry with me than that you classed me with just the common herd."

At this moment Mrs. Dalison came into the room with one of the good-looking, smart young men of the party, and I unconsciously let my eyes follow her; and I suppose some of the thoughts which were coursing through my mind showed in my face, for Sir Hugh, who was watching me keenly, said hurriedly, a note of impatience and chagrin in his voice, "Oh, it all sickens me—the gossips of the world——"

"I thought you said it was all right if one took it as a jest," I reminded him.

A cloud seemed to gather upon his whole face.

"Yes, so it is—in the abstract. But do you remember I told you that the music had touched some feeling in me that I thought was numb? Well——"

At that moment Mrs. Dalison looked at us mockingly from over her fan, and Sir Hugh said hurriedly, "Come, let us go back to the saloon and dance"; and he rose, and I rose, and we went indifferently out of the door; but his eyes were fierce as he made some ordinary remark, then gave me up to another partner.

It was after supper, at which he had sat with the Duchess, that he came up again. I was standing with Humphrey, and we were just going to say good-night."

"No, you must not go yet, General," he announced jovially.

'Mrs. Bohun has snubbed me all the evening, and now I want to persuade her to be gracious and give me one more dance."

"Of course you must, Guinevere," Humphrey ordered, and we started off.

"I suppose we shall now have to career round like two fools, and can't go and sit down as I want to, and talk," Sir Hugh whispered. "Aren't you going to ask me again soon to dine at Redwood Moat?"

"I do not know," I said. "Perhaps if you amuse Humphrey," and then I was angry with myself for saying such a thing—it slipped out because my desire is to see him—and I own it now that I have time to think.

"I'll ride over some afternoon and try and ingratiate myself, when this party has gone. You were coming to the hunt ball on Friday night?"

"Yes, I suppose so; we have to do everything that is correct now that we are 'country people'!" and I smiled.

"And you hate it all?"

"I did not say that."

"No—but I would like to see you gay, with those eyes suffused with love and laughter. Now, when I look at them, they are always full of unrest and pain—hidden and deep——"

I stopped dancing.

"You must not say such things to me ever again, Sir Hugh," I faltered, and my voice trembled. "You must leave me locked in my Moated Grange. No one must find the key. Now, good night." And, before he could answer me, I rejoined my husband and prepared to depart.

Sir Hugh came with us to the door, and I left Humphrey to say all the civil things; and as I got into the carriage I heard:

"Well, you'll come over to lunch next week," and "With the greatest pleasure, General!" Then the horses started.

All the way back Humphrey praised Sir Hugh and said amiable words about him—but I did not speak.

And my husband kissed my forehead when we said good night in the hall, having greatly enjoyed himself.

But I cannot sleep—I shall sit here at the east window and watch for the dawn.

CHAPTER V

I ENJOYED the hunt ball.

When I was first married, Humphrey did not really like my dancing, and used to stand and wait for me and take me off to himself directly each dance was finished. The idea of my sitting out, he explained to me, was disgusting to him, because people only sat out when they wanted to make some kind of love to each other! He is suspicious of every single action of man and woman—and would advocate the system of the Turks if he could. It must be so awful to have views like that, poisoning all simple things. He has never liked my dancing, but has had to put up with it, for fear of appearing ridiculous. He must have been the most crazily passionate and jealous lover when he was young—for me, I only know the jealous part—the passion had burned itself out, fortunately, before my day. But he has always boasted of his tremendous conquests—he loves to talk of himself, and is frequently very coarse. All those aspects of love ought to be so sacred, it seems to me—and not to be spoken about lightly, or they become revolting and common at once.

But to go back to what I was saying. I enjoyed the hunt ball.

I began it well, by trying to take Sir Hugh's advice, and look at the world with only a glancing eye, and several of his party were very nice to me, also I love the exercise of dancing for itself. I had quite a pretty dress, too, and did not have to put on the family jewels, which Humphrey will not let me have reset, and which I hate wearing. I had just my string of fine pearls.

Sir Hugh came up at once, and because there were programmes he deliberately asked me for two dances.

"I am obliged to do my duty and take in the Duchess to supper and generally keep my eye on my party," he said—"but if you can contain your hunger, I also will not eat any-

thing much, and then when the first rush has finished, will you come in quietly with me, and we can talk and eat in peace?" He got me to write his name for the two dances after the extras.

Perhaps that is why I enjoyed the first part of the ball—there was something pleasant to look forward to. I was so cunning when supper-time came! I knew I should be pounced upon to go in with the first set, because of being the wife of so influential a member of the hunt as Humphrey, so I pretended my dress was torn, and went to the dressing-room until they had all safely started! It felt such fun doing this—and I have had no fun for so many years. I was so very delicate after Algernon was born, for such a long time, I got out of the way of thinking I was human and ought to be gay and happy. It is not flattery when people take me for a young girl; I have that kind of type with no particular features, and that sort of shaped bones that do not make any shadows, and my throat is very long and slender and round, and my head very small—besides my being very slight of figure—so all these things are what give the girlish look. I am always addressed as "Miss" in shops.

I believe Sir Hugh saw the mischief in my eyes when he at last found me for our feast, for he pressed my hand on his arm against his side, and he said so gaily: "What has the little lady been doing? She has got a roguish glance in her gray mysteries."

Then I told him rather shyly, and we had a delightful laugh, like two truant children.

He had arranged just where we were to sit, at a corner little table that only held two, and it seemed that the waiters must have been warned to bring us the hottest quails and attend immediately to our wants.

Sir Hugh at first did not say any of the things which disturb me; he talked to me of books and pleasant subjects, and we found we loved so many of the same, and I forgot to be stiff, and let myself go, and oh! I was so happy. Then we spoke of music, and he asked me how I had learned to play like that, and I told him about Fräulein Strauss, who was my governess until I married, and was a great musician.

"But since then," I said, "I have never had any lessons. My husband thought it was absurd for a married woman, so I have just gone on in my own way. The music talks to me and has often comforted me when I have been sad."

"I hate you to be sad," Sir Hugh answered. "You look like some pure, exquisite flower, I cannot exactly say which,

to-night. You should always wear soft white satin and pearls."

"I am glad you like my frock," I returned. "I do not often have such a nice one as this."

"You are so sweet," he whispered. "You make me feel I want to take care of you. You ought to be where no rough winds blow."

"How kind you are, Sir Hugh!" And I could not meet his glance.

"All the other people appear—meretricious," he said, looking round. "When my eye gets back to you, it is at rest."

"I love peace and beauty," I faltered. "How happy one could be if it were left to one's self to choose one's environment!" And I suppose I sighed unconsciously, for he bent nearer to me.

"You were only a baby when you married, weren't you? So I dare say it did not give you much chance. I think I understand."

"Yes, I was not quite seventeen," I said. "I am thirty now. I shall be thirty-one in the summer. It is quite old, isn't it?"

He laughed. "You will never be old. You have a young soul—but it is full of all kinds of shadows that ought not to be there."

"What must I do, please?" I asked. "I do not like the shadows, but they always seem to come crowding in."

He looked at me penetratingly with his deep-blue eyes. There is something astonishingly attractive about him; his manner is so assured and calm, and it is so exquisite for him to be gentle and sympathetic like this, because his face in repose, or when talking to others, is cynical, and there is always a whimsical gleam in his eyes. I could not help feeling emotion. It seemed as though we were two beings apart there in the supper-room of the Redwood Hunt Ball and that we had turned our corner into our own little kingdom.

"I must help you to take the shadows away," he said softly. "You must let me find the key of the Moated Grange, after all, won't you, my pale, sweet lady?"

"I—I am afraid," I answered, and then my glance caught sight of Mrs. Dalison, who had just come into the room and sat down with her back to us. She had not seen us. "And, besides—" I went on, and stopped abruptly.

He looked at her, too, and then he looked down at his plate; and when his eyes sought mine again they were troubled.

"I want you to put all foolish things you have heard out of your head—will you, please?" he pleaded. "They have nothing at all to do with you and me—the side of me that I want you to let come into your life contains only those things which I think you would wish that it should. Good God! I do not speak in this way to women as a rule; I do not know what has come to me to-night," and he pushed back his chair for a second and passed his hand over his eyes.

I was strangely touched—and I knew then that I wanted him so to be my friend, and that I hated to think material unpleasant things about him. I would try not to let these ugly thoughts come into my head. Letitia has often said there are sides of a man no wise woman should investigate if she wants him to continue to give satisfaction to herself. She argued to me once about Freddy Burgoyne—one of her admirers. "Yes, I know Freddy is selfish and lets those other women flatter him and make up to him—and that he is sometimes vile to me—but for the moment he is the thing I want to amuse me; so as long as that feeling lasts, why should I spoil it by letting irrelevant aspects come between?" Letitia is so wise, I will try to copy her. As I would like Sir Hugh for my friend, why should I mind his having some part of him which finds agreement with a painted-up obvious woman like Mrs. Dalison?

He watched me anxiously, and then he said:

"You need never speak to make yourself understood, you know—the whole argument has been disclosed in those gray discs—and you are right in the conclusion you have come to."

"Then let us go back to how you can help me to chase away the shadows," I agreed.

"You must take a strong interest in some one thing—or person," he said, "so that your mind is filled with that subject to the exclusion of all others."

"But that would be an obsession. What then?" I demanded.

"Infinite joy," and his voice was a caress, and over me there rushed a mad emotion, a sudden realization of what life could mean—perhaps—what love could certainly fulfil, what sorrow might be—alas! and I put up my hands unconsciously to ward off some danger, and answered him very low:

"There are too many possibilities in your receipt for shadow-chasing, Sir Hugh."

He did not press the subject—he became gay again and diverted me, and then presently we went back to the ballroom through the other door, unperceived by Mrs. Dalison.

Here we danced a two-step, a new dance just coming in from America—and Sir Hugh did this better than a waltz, and I enjoyed it.

"I really don't care for dancing," he said. "It could mean divine things if one adored the woman—and then one would not want to hold her with every one looking on—and if one is indifferent, it is just a teetotum—but it is the jolly sort of thing one has to do at times!"

"I like it," I returned, "and I do not put any meaning into it; it is purely pleasant exercise."

"Well, it is quite suitable that we should finish up our enchanting supper in a banal way like this," he announced. "Because then it will let me sleep in peace. I was extremely disturbed just now."

But I did not tell him that I had been so, too. Then we stopped near Humphrey, and Sir Hugh exchanged some cheerful, friendly banter with him, and sauntered off indifferently, leaving my husband well content. I stayed with Humphrey for the next two dances, and we walked about the rooms, and he introduced me to more of his old friends. They were all very genial and pleased to welcome us—and I felt so happy. I was more unbending than usual, and, I hope, made a better impression.

Humphrey was actually satisfied with me—and told me so grudgingly on our way home. Just before we were leaving, Sir Hugh came up again.

"Don't you forget, General, that you have asked me to lunch next week," he said. "I particularly want to see what you are doing in your stables with that new patent for the drainage. Can I come over rather early and have a look round?"

And Humphrey gladly arranged things—the following Tuesday it was to be; Sir Hugh's guests would be leaving on the Monday.

"But bring some of your friends over on Sunday, if you like," Humphrey continued. "The place is so old, it interests strangers."

Sir Hugh accepted with not too great a show of alacrity, and said good-night.

When the Sunday came I began to feel that nervous excitement I have experienced once or twice. All through church it worried me, and I found it difficult to keep my mind on any subject.

I had made everything I am allowed to have a say in look as nice as I could. There were spring flowers everywhere

that Humphrey will let them be put. He does not like flowers in the rooms he sits in, he says they make his head ache in the place where he was wounded long ago. They say nothing to either him or Algernon—flowers. Here at our permanent home gradually I shall hope to be allowed to take some interest in the garden—I must do it very gradually, though, and at least in my little turret room I can have whatever masses I can secure. It is blazing with daffodils now, and tulips, and hyacinths of purple and mauve, and I put a quaint old hooded arm-chair up there that Humphrey turned out of the smoking-room, and covered it myself with a piece of very faded magenta brocade that has become a tone of wonderful beauty since its early Victorian blatant days. And there are curtains of this weird shade, too, but all so changed with time that they belie the name magenta. Humphrey condemned them only last Thursday from the smaller sitting-room which had been furnished by his mother, and I gladly took them to my bare little shrine. They are of the thickest silk and no objectionable pattern, and I am well content; and when I get great sprays of purple iris against them they seem to glow into wondrous tints.

I am saving up my slender pocket-money, and when I have enough I am going to buy one of those tiny pianos one can get for yachts, and it will go into the space between the east and north window, then I can play to myself for hours, and no one will hear me or become fretful with the noise. Algernon hates music, it irritates him always when I play—unless sometimes a jolly comic song that he can shout out of tune. Is it not strange that my own son should not have one touch in him of this great passion of mine, but should be all like his father in his tastes and desires. Perhaps Letitia's theory is right, after all.

The Duchess and Miss St. Clair came with the Minton Dremont party of men, about four o'clock—they had walked over, and there was another woman, too—the one who had admired Algernon, and also Lady Hilda Flint. There were nine of the party altogether, counting Sir Hugh.

We took them first to the stables and the greenhouses, and then the Duchess was enthusiastic about the moat and the walled garden, and the old, old shabby rooms. And Humphrey himself actually suggested that they should be taken up to the Lady Margaret's Chamber, and told the ghost story there—and at this Sir Hugh frowned. But I had to lead the way, only we went to it from the great stone main staircase, not by my winding turret steps.

They were full of exclamations and admiration, but one and all decided nothing would induce them to inhabit such a ghostly place. The door into my shrine was closed, and I did not open it, but Miss St. Clair did, in a happy-go-lucky way. The sun was pouring in at the west window obliquely through the immense thickness of the walls, and fell upon the old chair and the flowers on the table with a great shaft of light; it made a wonderful picture, and she cried aloud, and Sir Hugh, in the rapid clustering of the rest of the company to see it, got close and whispered in my ear:

"I hate them to go there—I want to think of that shrine always for you alone."

Humphrey then explained to them about the staircase; they must go down it, they said, and all pressed forward—Sir Hugh and I were left to the last. Then he drew me to the east window, and pointed to the trees in the park of Minton Dremont.

"Every morning when you look out at that tallest oak, with my flag waving above it, remember that the man who owns both is thinking of you, sweet Ladye," he whispered, and turned down the dark stairs after the others without a word more, leaving me, with my heart beating strangely, to follow as best I could.

"You must have a golf course in the park beyond the moat," they all assured Humphrey, and he murmured a consent. He has taken to golf himself now in the past six months. I am glad for him to do anything. When he first gave up his command he did nothing but hang about me, and was cross and complaining and often having the gout.

Algernon had joined us before we came upstairs to my room, and was enchanting the lady who had admired him so. He is like Humphrey, he is always gallant and attractive to strangers, but I wish he would be kinder to me when we are alone; I fear he will never be kind to any woman; he will make a masterful and fascinating lover by-and-by, but the instinct which shows when he teases Petrov will always come out.

On Sundays he stays up to dinner with us, and he held forth about the party that had been in the afternoon. Sir Hugh was a "jolly good sort," and he ticketed off the rest with wonderful accuracy, much to Humphrey's amusement. He encourages Algernon to talk, and then for the slightest weariness caused, he snubs him sharply, and has often sent him to bed; so the boy is alternately arrogant or nervous. He is only really happy and sweet when he is out for a ride

alone with me. I never like to see his faults, because he is my child, but I cannot help realizing as time goes on that nature is stronger than any influence, and that whatever I can do with my tenderness is counterbalanced by the strong Bohun strain.

Oh! I wonder what it would have been like if I had married some one I loved, and my son had hourly reminded me of dear features and traits, creeping ever more deeply into my heart in consequence.

I wonder, if Sir Hugh had a son, what he would be like——?

I wonder if he will marry? Surely there must be a draught coming in from the west window—or the day has turned chill. I feel suddenly cold.

Rooks, what are you telling each other with your cawing? Some tale of love and the spring-time, surely, you grave people. But your nests are full of little ones and the fulfilment of the growing year.

CHAPTER VI

LETITIA paid us a surprise visit on Monday. She was motoring up to Cheshire and looked in upon us on her way, she said.

She had a quizzical expression in her eyes as she talked with me up in my turret chamber after tea.

"This room looks charming now," she said. "It is rather like you, Guinevere, with its gray stone walls and transparently simple furniture, and then these rich, faded curtains and the purple flowers against them. I believe there are tremendous possibilities for passion in you."

"Then you ought not to try and stir them up by suggesting their existence," I returned. "You know very well what my life is, and how I must go through with it."

"You said when I was here before that you wanted to live —I was wondering if you had begun.

I wondered, too, but I did not say anything.

"Tell me about the race week and Hugh Dremont's party," my sister went on. "I had an amusing letter from Ada Marjoribanks this morning before I started, with her version, but I want to hear yours."

"It was quite agreeable," I responded. "I did not make out which was Lady Marjoribanks—only one or two of them spoke to me, you know."

"I dare say. They are rather casual in that set—but most of them are my intimate friends. I ought to have told them to be nice to you."

"I really did not particularly want them to be so," and I looked out of the east window idly. "Besides, I should hate that people should be nice to me to please some one else, not from inclination."

"Guinevere, don't be a fool—you must take things as they are. In the world, you see, it is all a question of *quid pro quo;* no one has time for any real sentiments; and then one set gets to know all its own little ways and looks upon any

additional person from outside as an interloper. We all know what we are each going to say or do, and what our particular cat's-tricks will be with each other, so it is no trouble, whereas, if a new woman comes in, we are disturbed—she may have strange methods, and her claws may be sharpened in a different way, and she may be a dangerous quantity, and snatch our men. So we freeze her, on chance."

"One would think the men would get terribly bored with all of you, meeting you over and over again," I hazarded. "It cannot be amusing for a man to know exactly what you are all going to say upon any given occasion."

"We become habits—and we are all easy and *sans gêne*," Letitia returned, leaning back her comely head against the faded magenta chair back, "and they have not to make any special exertions for us. Then there is the gentle stimulation of the periodical shuffle of the people we are amusing ourselves with, and we are all fairly well educated and have picked up all the political and literary shibboleths that are necessary to carry on the game. You see, one year, we'll say, I watch the Duchess and Freddy Burgoyne. I see all the faults in her methods with him, and I try to correct them when I get him to play with, and so on with the rest, according to their intelligence."

"Was Lady Marjoribanks the one with the narrow eyes and fuzzy hair and rather frumpish clothes?" I asked.

"I expect so," said my sister. "She does not look attractive at the first glance, but she is awfully clever, and has brought the art of flattering a man to the finest point. She gets everything out of him—the secrets of his innermost soul—and twists them all to her purpose. It is much wisest to be friends with Ada. Winnie Latrobe was there, too. Did you meet her?"

I said I believed that was a lady's name, and she was the one who had admired Algernon.

"Poor old Win!" Letitia said. "She is separated from Sir Henry, her husband. But his family stuck to her—she's so rich—so she still goes everywhere. Her father was a shrewd, hard-headed Scotch coal owner."

"She rhapsodized over Algernon," I said.

"She has her eye upon him for five years from now, for her daughter, you may depend upon it, dear—you will then have to be careful with him." And Letitia laughed her merry laugh, showing her rather big white teeth. If one wanted a specimen of something wholesome and splendid, one would select Letitia.

"Do you all hate each other underneath?" I asked—but she looked quite surprised.

"Of course we don't! We are like our men are with us—accustomed to one another. We only get up little hates during the shuffling season, if one of us undermines the other's friend before we are ready to let him go—but we soon settle down again."

"One woman gushed to me over her children," I said.

"Oh, that was surely Lady George Trebearn," Letitia returned. "She always does to strangers—of course we all know she never troubles about them the moment they are old enough to be no longer graceful adjuncts to her style of beauty. She has at least six, and two ought to be coming out next year—they are rather plain, so probably she'll put it off for a season or two."

"It sounds all very wonderful to me," I said. "How do they look upon marriage vows in your world?"

"Marriage vows!" laughed Letitia. "My world, or any world, was always the same, my little sister, because it contains human beings of two sexes—and the Almighty planted a strong desire in them for each other, to make His scheme for continued population work against any odds. During all the ages this magnetic attraction will suddenly start up between two people, and if it is strong enough, no marriage vows have ever been the least use. In some times like the Cinquecento people understood this. Then climate makes a difference—and opportunity—and the wave of sentiment. In the Victorian era a period of rigorous hypocrisy held sway, and lots of women were as good as gold because they could not get beyond its influence, and it was a fortunate thing. But no *laws* will make human beings faithful to one another. There are some intensely sensitive souls—you are probably one, Guinevere"—and my sister looked at me critically—"who have such a high self-respect that they could not soil their own sense of honor in a bargain, and so they might remain faithful physically; but even such beings cannot control the spirit, and they sin—if it is sin, which I do not altogether admit—whenever their thoughts turn to the loved one."

"It is frightfully difficult to understand," I sighed.

"Not at all," returned my sister. "One must have a sense of the fitness of things, and not make scandals, if one is unlucky enough not to have a high sense of honor. One must in every way fulfil one's duties in life and the duties of one's position—and if it is important to continue a fine fam-

ily, I think it is abominably unfair not to play the game—but, after all those things are done, I maintain it is entirely 'up to you,' as the Americans say so cleverly, whether you choose to enjoy your life as you like, or no. You may be certain, if you do it in a stupid way which infringes upon the comfort or prejudice of the community in which you live, and you break their moral law, you will be made to pay for it. To keep things going well for the community you have to bow to Hypocrisy. It is much the best thing to do, no matter what your opinions may be."

"Then there is no truth or faith or honesty left," I said sadly. "I hate to think all these things, Letitia."

My sister looked at me so kindly.

"You always were a darling little fool, Guinevere," she declared. "There is all truth and faith and honesty, but we each of us create our own. Your class of soul will draw its heaven in the passionate and exalted devotion of one man—those are your ideals—as the eagle, noblest of birds, has one mate. Your brain capacity and your sweet personality might probably keep the one man loving you always—when he found you—and the degradation to your spirit, did you give yourself to both a husband and a lover, would probably entirely obliterate for you any pleasure in so doing. You are naturally a pure and refined *ego*—but there are millions and millions who have not reached that plane yet, and who get heaven and all the joy of life out of change. It is certainly not for you or me to judge them, although we may be sorry for them. All we can judge or condemn are their methods, if they give the thing away and so degrade the community." Letitia's face was quite serious now. "For the continuation of society—for a chance to be given to all to grow to your plane—the outside decencies must be kept up as a good example. That is all one ought to ask of people, because all are not strong enough to be nobly good in themselves."

"Yes, I see," I said. "The right and wrong of a thing, then lies entirely in the personal conscience upon the matter, according to your theory."

Letitia puffed smoke rings while she went on meditatively:

"The personal conscience should always be guided by the result of any action upon the community—otherwise chaos would come again. We must all remember that we have only the right to enjoy ourselves when we are not deliberately hurting the community, and even then it is a serious question, and generally brings pain."

"What should a woman do, when she has children?" I asked. My sister does interest me so when she holds forth.

"What all good animals do—take the tenderest care of them until they can take care of themselves," she retorted. "That is one of Nature's inexorable laws, and the breaking of it draws nearly all the misery of civilized life."

At this moment we heard a noise on the little staircase. It developed from just a sound into articulate swearing, so I knew it was my husband, and that he had probably come out of the drawing-room floor and grazed some part of his person in the dark. This would mean he would blame somebody, and either order a light to be permanently kept on the staircase, or decide not to come that way himself again—I hoped the latter, which proved to be correct. He went back into the library and shut the door—but the interruption broke the thread of Letitia's homily upon worldly ethics, and she turned to the subject of clothes, and so back to the party at Minton Dremont. It appeared Ada Marjoribanks had mentioned me in her letter— "A quiet little thing, your sister, with a certain distinction, my dear Letitia," and "stormy eyes"—she had written—also that "Claire Dalison's day was completely over, a bat could see that," but who should have the proud position of diverter of the transient fancy of the gifted host was still uncertain! Each had tried her hardest, and would continue to do so, as the perquisites of the situation, as they all well knew, were not to be sneezed at!

I wondered had this pack of charming wolves known about our supper, and that Sir Hugh is coming to-morrow to luncheon—to inspect the new system of the stables' drainage —what inference would they put upon these facts!—and a smile grew in my eyes, which Letitia noticed.

"Guinevere," she said, getting up from her chair and sitting down in the east window-seat, "I want to give you this piece of advice—If the person who owns those red chimneys and lordly tree-tops turns his eye in your humble direction, never let them—my friends—have a suspicion about it. They would tear you in pieces remorselessly—they would destroy you socially, and make you ridiculous to him—they are all very clever, you know, child."

A shaft of the dying sunlight came from under a heavy cloud through the west window, and gilded my head. It seemed like God's glory and peace, and I answered her calmly.

"I do not speak of Sir Hugh Dremont in this, Letitia, but of any man who cared for me. If his love could not stand the test of the insidious attack of those poor things of earth

—it could not touch me, or my heart—his soul would not be fine enough—because all these things and these methods that you have been speaking about are not in my ken, and cannot affect me."

Letitia kissed me, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Darling," she said, "I hate to remember that long ago—when I did not know—I helped to build this prison-house for you. But oh! Guinevere, if you ever want a friend, with her head screwed on, remember your old sister."

We are not emotional people, and when I had returned her expression of feeling, we at once talked of other things—and Algernon came bounding in from my bedroom, alas! chasing Petrov, who turned at bay and hissed at him from beneath the table.

"Algernon, I have asked you not to tease my cat," I said to him. "Please try to remember, dear boy."

His handsome gray eyes looked up at me defiantly, and then he hung his head. "I don't know why you have the nasty beast, Mother—I wonder Father lets you," he stuttered.

Letitia scolded him, and tried to explain that I had a right to my pets just as he had, and it was very rude and cowardly of him continually to provoke Petrov.

His face grew crimson with temper, and he would have been impertinent in a second, only that children and servants are not naturally impertinent to Letitia.

"Would you like your mother to chase Pip every time she saw him?" my sister asked. Pip is one of Algernon's clever ratting terriers, and not a well-behaved dog in the house.

"No," my son retorted; "but, of course, that is ridiculous, Aunty. Pip's a dog, not a cat!"

He said it in exactly the same tone that Humphrey once used to me, in speaking of the justice of a certain case:

"How absurd you are, Guinevere! We are talking of a woman, not a man."

I hope Eton will equilibrate Algernon's point of view!—if some day I shall have a daughter-in-law.

CHAPTER VII

THIS morning Humphrey informed my sister that Sir Hugh was lunching—I had tried to say it casually yesterday when we talked in my little room, but somehow it would not come out—and now, as my husband spoke, she caught my eye, and I felt myself becoming crimson. It infuriated me so, that when Sir Hugh did arrive, on his black horse, looking so attractive, I was like ice to him. He came at half-past twelve—to see the stables, one must suppose! Well, he had to in any case, because I went up to my room the minute we had shaken hands out in the courtyard, and did not come down again until the lunch-gong sounded. I fancy Letitia and Humphrey conducted him to see those interesting drains.

I could not have been more aloof than I was at luncheon, and most of the conversation fell to Humphrey and Algernon, so far as the family at Redwood Moat was concerned. Then, after lunch, Letitia had to start on her journey to Cheshire.

"I'll leave at two-fifteen," she said. "Humphrey, do send some gees on to Templehurst now, and you and Algernon come with me in the motor. I am sure if you once tried this open Mercedes, you would be persuaded to have one—you'd find it so awfully useful for the far meets."

Humphrey demurred, but Letitia used her most entrancing cajolments, and Algernon was dying to go, so at last my husband gave way.

"Guinevere, you'll have to give Sir Hugh some coffee—we've no time to stop for ours," Humphrey announced, to my intense surprise. Never before in our married lives has he suggested leaving me alone with a man. It shows the effect Sir Hugh must have had upon him—or Letitia and the motor.

Sir Hugh murmured something about being obliged to rush off immediately, and paid no further attention to me, until we were standing alone watching the car glide over

the drawbridge—now permanently lowered while we are at home. Then he turned and said, in the voice of a glad schoolboy:

"They will arrive at Templehurst at about half-past three, but the horses cannot be there until four o'clock, and it will take more than an hour and a half to get them back here, which brings it to half-past five—or later. If you should be lonely during that time, may I stay for a little after we have had our coffee?"

I said a kind of yes, and led him to the drawing-room, where I had told Hartington we would have it. And while he was following me up the great stone stairs Sir Hugh made suitable remarks about their wonderful antiquity and their state of preservation, so that all nervousness had left me by the time we reached the big cold room. A wood-fire had just been lit in the huge open grate, and a dog or two slumbered on the bearskin rug in front of it.

There is a queer scent in some burning wood which seems to awaken memory in me—some vague, strange memory of long ago, it would almost seem of some previous existence, as I never can trace it to anything conscious in my present one. It causes me some feeling of shelter after stress, a haven reached after hard fighting, a sudden contentment.

I was aware of this now creeping over me as the logs crackled and blazed—and we went over close to them. Hartington had already brought the coffee, and it stood with liqueurs and cigarettes on a little table near. I sat down in one of the great, splendid carved chairs whose backs tower above the head of the person seated, in a scrollwork of black oak ending in a king's crown—of the Cavaliers' time, I believe, before the family turned Roundhead, and a gift from King Charles the Martyr.

Sir Hugh took his cup and handed me mine without further ceremony, and for a few moments he did not speak; then he finished his coffee and came over nearer to me.

"Will you play to me?" he asked very gently, without any "please," and I said "Yes," and went to the piano. He pulled a chair where he could comfortably watch my face, and he took a cigarette and leaned back, half closing his eyes. And all the pent-up emotion in my heart rushed forth in the music, so that I forgot his presence almost, and lived in that far world into which I often go.

I played for half an hour, perhaps, without stopping, one thing after another, until I came to an arrangement I have made of that simple song of the North, "Aye fond kiss," and

it sobbed out under my fingers, and then there was silence.

Sir Hugh got up and came to the piano. He had not stirred all the time—and his cigarette was still unlighted.

"I won't say thank you," he murmured, very low. "It is beyond that. Your sister said you were a witch, and I think she was right—you have cast a spell over me. You took me to heaven—and hell—in these thirty minutes—I seemed to grow detached, and taste of things beyond." His voice ceased, and he looked deeply into my eyes. "I saw times of my boyhood," he went on, as I did not speak but sat idly there before the keys, with my hands in my lap. "I felt old beliefs returning, old emotions surging up, and then strange sorrows—and that last thing seems the echo of some exquisite pain."

I played it again very softly, with him leaning there close to me—and then I looked straight up into his blue eyes.

"Burns' words are sad enough," I said, "but they mean nothing to me—that simpler air says everything that one could say of farewell."

"Play something gay, then," he pleaded seriously. "There shall never be farewell between you and me."

But I rose from the piano.

"No, I will not play any more to-day—the mood is over," I said. "We must leave it at—Farewell."

I could see he was extremely moved—and oh! I was so stirred myself, I did not dare to look again at him—he walked rapidly to the fireplace and lit his cigarette, and then he said:

"I want to see your books—the things you touch and read, that occupy you. Won't you show them to me?"

"They are all upstairs in the turret room," I answered, "and I cannot take you there."

"Yes, I suppose everything must be for you—alone—untouched by the rest of the world. I should have known that."

"I have to be solitary," I sighed, "because no one else cares for the things I do—it is not because I like being lonely."

"Then you would share your pleasure if you came across one who could feel it with you?" he asked eagerly—and tenderly.

"I might—could such a being be found."

"How commonplace and distasteful you would make the rest of the world seem if one were much with you," he exclaimed, as though struck with something suddenly; "unless

one could keep you always, it would be the sorrow and ache of that tune."

"Oh!" I cried, "Sir Hugh—we are becoming too serious. Try to remember you are here taking coffee with a dull country neighbor, and should now be saying adieu."

But he did not stir. He only looked up at the clock.

"It is not half-past three yet," he said. "They have only about got to Templehurst. What are you going to do with the rest of the afternoon?"

"I had thought of seeing Jenkins—the head gardener—and perhaps getting in a few hints of my wishes about things. Humphrey does not like any one to interfere openly with anything here"—and then, feeling I ought not to have given away this secret, I added hurriedly—"You see, it was his old family home, and of course it is natural he should not like me to touch it."

Such a look came in Sir Hugh's face—and his eyebrow went up.

"Not like you to touch it!" he exclaimed. "Why—" he left his sentence unfinished, and puffed his cigarette. Then he went on: "The joy to have a garden—or anything that you had arranged! How I wish you would come and settle one for me! Will you? I will have exactly what you wish, and it shall be sacred to you, and no one shall ever go there."

"But what good would that be to me, Sir Hugh?" I asked. "I could never see it except by stealth; and a garden should be a rest—a *soulagement* from pain—a friend to share one's moods and sympathize with one's thoughts—somewhere to escape to when walls seem to detain the spirit in chains."

"Take me with you out to see Jenkins, then," he said. "And let us find a bench—and talk—out of doors."

"I'll get a coat. It has turned cold. I won't keep you waiting long." And I went from him up to my room through the turret stairs.

When I got back he was sitting stroking Petrov, who, to my astonishment, was perched upon his knees—Petrov, who hates all men!

"Oh! that is dear of you," I cried. "No one but I am ever kind to my poor cat." And I took the great blue-gray beast from him and caressed him, crooning with the little sounds which he and I understand.

"He cannot want any other kindness," Sir Hugh retorted. "He is too hatefully fortunate as it is."

The sinuous, handsome creature pushed his sleek head

up into my neck under my chin and ear, and purred loudly—a human speech could not have better expressed affection and content.

"He is the one thing on earth who loves me without reservation—loves me alone—and only me," I said.

Sir Hugh did not speak—and I carried Petrov to the little stairs and let him run up to safety in the turret room. How he got into the drawing-room I do not know.

I tried to be merry when we went out into the walled garden. We had come down from the little library, but remembering the effect of the dark before, I did not risk it again, and made my companion go on first and open the lower door. It was quite warm and pleasant in the sunlight, but Jenkins was nowhere about, so we sat upon an old bench, facing the sun-dial, and discoursed of many things.

Sir Hugh is clever and exquisitely cultivated—we could jump from subject to subject without that distressing blankness coming into his face which so often comes into people's faces unless one sticks to the one thing they know. We spoke of Italy, and especially Venice, where I went last year—only it was too early, and Humphrey hated it, and turned it all into ridicule and quarrelled with the gondoliers; but I used to try and imagine it as it would be in the warmth—alone, or with a sympathetic companion. Sir Hugh told me of it now so that I could see it all again—and glorified.

He has read strange old books, too, that I thought no one but I had ever bothered about—even Johnson's "Rasselas" and we spoke of the happy valley and the weariness of the everlasting—even beauty—and Sir Hugh said, the reason why the poor prince and his sister never found happiness was because they never even looked for it—in love.

"'Rasselas' is like most of the Bible," he said. "Love—what I mean by love—that is, not merely a physical passion, but the exaltation of the soul blended with it—is not mentioned as a factor in the scheme of things by Johnson. Perhaps he did not know of it himself."

"Do you know very much about love, Sir Hugh?" I asked, and then felt dreadfully frightened at myself for such daring—and went on hurriedly—"I mean, you are old enough, and not married, and—free. You have had time to learn."

"I thought I did," he answered, tapping his boot with his riding whip and not looking at me. "But now I am not sure. My ideas have been rather upset about it—lately. Tell me, what do you think it is?"

"Something beautiful and terrible—and vital—something that should gild dark places and turn stones into jewels—something tender enough to be of the angels, and warm enough to be of the sun.—Oh! something that could never be on earth," I sighed.

"It lies with the woman to cause such feelings in a man," he said. "Most of them inspire a very different set of sentiments. People forget that whatever others who know them well feel for them is whatever presentment of themselves they have created in those others' hearts."

"Yes, that seems true."

"For some women one feels nothing but a physical desire—their mental qualities do not enter into the matter—and this goes off as soon as satisfied, and disgust alone remains. And for others one feels respect—or sympathy—or one is agreeably amused with them—each emotion caused by the woman herself. It is when one comes upon one who touches all these notes in a man—then an almighty passion is aroused, a passion which could grow into the mainspring of—life."

"But it does not lie with the woman alone, because a woman might cause such feelings in one man and leave ten others cold. Those things could only be aroused if both were in tune, surely," I said.

He turned deliberately and looked at me long, as if his eyes were devouring my face—then he sighed almost unconsciously, and shook himself slightly, turning to the sun.

"If I sit here talking to you longer now," he said, "upon these subjects, I shall be tempted to say things to you that you might be angry with me for. I have been so awfully happy to-day that I want to take away a memory of peace. If I can arrange it so that it is no worry for you, may I come again?"

"Yes, do," I returned. "It is past four o'clock now. Will you come back to the house, and I will ring for your horse."

"I want you to come to Minton Dremont. I want to show you my garden, and the haunts I love. I shall write a formal note and ask you to lunch, and somehow I will arrange that I have you to myself for a little—if you will let me. I think you have granted me just one peep inside your Moated Grange to-day."

"I would like to see your house," I said. "Arrange it if you can."

Then we walked through the iron gate and out into the courtyard, and there we rang the doorbell, and soon his black beautiful Cæsar came round, and he mounted and rode

away. And his figure is a very pleasing thing to watch retreating from view on a horse—so lithe and strong and spare.

And now I am sitting up in my turret room, and Petrov is purring upon my knee.

Petrov, what do you think of this Sir Hugh Dremont?—Is he a man as Humphrey says they all are—just using his clever wits to beguile your simple mistress—for a pastime for himself?—or is there something more in his interest?—But in all cases we must not grow to care too much which it is. Must we, my cat?

CHAPTER VIII

I HEARD from Letitia a day or two afterward, from her place in Cheshire. They had had quite a nice drive as far as Templehurst in the motor, and she expected I had not been bored either! She felt I deserved a little pleasure, which she hoped she had secured for me.

"I must tell you one thing, Guinevere," she wrote. "I have known Hugh Dremont for ten years, and I have never known him to bother himself before about inspecting the drainage of other people's stables. You can make what inference you please from this!"

I tried not to feel too much pleasure as I read. I have made up my mind I must go no further with our very agreeable friendship, and I have taken to looking out of the north window instead of the east—from it one only gets obliquely any reminder of Minton Dremont.

I believe Sir Hugh is in London—we have heard nothing of him, and a week has gone by. It is the tenth of May. The spring has been unusually fine and warm until the last few days. I have got an interesting new book upon Florence, and the spirit of the great Medici time, and I have been deep in it since it came. I like to read three or four upon the same subject, one after the other, and compare them and make my own deductions from all. If I could have seen Italy as I wished instead of being rushed through all the interesting things, and never allowed to stop when the hotels happened to be bad, I would have loved it so. As it was, even, it said wonderful things to me. Sir Hugh knows it so well; the next time I see him we must exchange more views about it.

As I was writing, the afternoon post came in, and there is a letter from him from London. Just a very stiff note. He will be returning in a day or two, and his sister and her little girl and boy will be with him. He would be so de-

lighted if Humphrey and I and Algernon would come and meet them at luncheon on Friday. I hope my husband will accept.

I am glad this place is so isolated, and the few neighbors who are of the old set, and friends of Humphrey's, are rather far away. I believe I have so grown out of the habit of people coming to see me often, in these last years, that I should find it very tiresome if they dropped in. They all think of nothing but hunting and golf, and are plainly bored if one speaks of another subject.

Humphrey has had a threatening of gout the last three days, and his temper has been perfectly awful. Both footmen are leaving, in spite of Hartington's good sense and tact. It has seemed that this little room is the only place I can get away from the noise of Humphrey's swearing. It has poured, too, and we could not go out—and even Algernon, who does not care for this part of the house at all, has crept up with me after lunch for safety. He is very restless, and knocks over my books and anything he can, but I love to have him; and we have had some talks and been very friendly—though his natural point of view is so diametrically opposed to mine upon most subjects, it is often difficult. But about cricket I listen for hours. He only cares to speak of things that he knows of—and I do not.

"I wonder why father has such a beastly temper," he said just now. "It is sickening, isn't it, mum?"

And I told him it was probably because Humphrey had never tried to control it when he was young. But I so dislike drawing morals—my only way is to explain the law of cause and effect to him, about abstract things, and leave the deductions to his own intelligence. He is a character almost impossible to influence. Strongly passionate, and yet impervious to anything tender. He is so handsome, even at thirteen he gives promise of being a glorious-looking man. Women are sure to spoil him, and he is sure to make any of them who love him very unhappy.

. . . . . .

I did not dare to give Sir Hugh's note to Humphrey until after dinner, when he was in a less disagreeable mood.

"It will quite depend how I feel," he said. "I'll answer the letter myself. Dremont is a sensible man, and will understand." That it would give Algernon and me pleasure to go, whether he did or not, was an aspect of the case which would not even be likely to present itself to him.

Indeed, until Friday morning came I was not aware what he intended to do.

Then he decided he would go—so the brougham was ordered. His foot is still in too precarious a state to climb into the phaeton.

Sir Hugh met us in the hall at Minton Dremont, and was so sympathetic about the gout, and so glad we had come.

"My sister is most anxious to renew her acquaintance with you, my dear General," he said. "She says you were a very great friend of hers when you were quartered at York twenty years ago. She was a girl then—and used to stay with my grandmother, Lady Wynlake, near there."

"Of course I remember her!" Humphrey returned, delighted, and we went on into a morning-room with its fresh chintzes and a delicious southern aspect. None of the rooms are gloomy here.

Lady Morvaine rose to greet us. She is so sweet-looking, rather like Sir Hugh, though a few years older, and not the least like any of his race-party friends. She was genial and gracious, and made everything smooth and pleasant, and Algernon and the boy and girl were presented to each other, and we all went in to luncheon.

It felt so peaceful to know we should have one meal at least without an explosion falling upon the head of some luckless servant. No stranger could believe that the gallant, handsome General Bohun of society could be the same as the one his wife and son know.

Algernon has not a sense of humor, or we could often comfort ourselves with the comic aspect of things.

The Morvaine boy—Lord Burbridge—is already at Eton, but home just now to recover from a broken arm, so he and Algernon got on to interesting topics, and one could see intended to spend an agreeable afternoon together.

Lord Burbridge knew of a most enchanting spot at the home farm where some old piggeries were being pulled down, and which would yield a fine harvest of rats—if "Uncle Hugh" would let them have Higgs and one of the terriers.

"Oh! if I'd only brought Pip and Snack!" I heard my son say with regretful enthusiasm; and Sir Hugh offered at once to send the motor for these talented animals, while two pairs of sparkling eyes turned to him in gratitude, and the little Lady Adela Carnoly looked pitifully longing to be allowed also to participate in this coming joy.

"You'll let her go—won't you, Lady Morvaine?" Humphrey pleaded. "A good sporting instinct ought to be encouraged in girls—it makes 'em less fanciful and squeamish. My wife there would be twice the woman she is if she had been knocked about by half a dozen brothers."

And at this Sir Hugh's glance met mine, and it contained such kind understanding.

We all left the dining-room together, and drank our coffee in the saloon, while the children rushed off to their enthralling sport, and then our host said:

"If you don't feel equal to a prowl, General, will you stay and keep my sister company for a while? I am so anxious to show Mrs. Bohun my gardens."

Lady Morvaine most graciously seconded this arrangement, flattering Humphrey with sentences constantly beginning, "Do you remember" this or that?

The rain had ceased the day before, and everything was green and beautiful, and the spring flowers were in masses of the greatest perfection—the borders a glory of May-tulips and wallflowers and irises and forget-me-nots, and all sorts of other things coming into bloom.

Oh! it gave me so much pleasure to wander along the paths with Sir Hugh. Nothing could be more beautiful than the way the whole thing is laid out, or the natural formation of the ground, or the view. He was so charming, too—quite a new side of himself he showed me. A side which soothed and comforted me, and made me feel at peace. He really knows all about gardens, and is interested in them, and we talked of our favorite plants and flowers, and what they meant to us.

"It does seem so awful," he said, as we sat down on a bench under a pergola of coming ramblers, "that you should not have entire control of your lovely old-walled plaisance. It could be such an interest to you, and with your exquisite taste, you could make it unique—it is so old.

"Yes," I agreed, "but there is no use thinking of that I may not have those joys. Perhaps I shall be able to get a little pleasure out of it, even so. A very old garden does not depress me as a very old house does—there in the open air the currents cannot affect one so much. Up in my rooms sometimes the oppression of the spirits of all those sad people who have gone before almost overcomes me. I know it is very foolish of me, but at night once or twice I have been —afraid——"

Sir Hugh was leaning upon the back of the bench, sitting

sideways, so that he looked right into my face, very near, and I could see every transient expression in his deep-set eyes. A fierce light came into them.

"I can't bear to think of it," he said, clenching his hand. "How can the General allow you to be all alone in that grim suite! If you were ill in the night, whom could you call?"

"I could ring for my maid, right in the servants' wing—she would come after a while—"

He looked disturbed and troubled.

"Is there no other place you could have?" he asked.

"No other where I would be in—peace."

"Of course we cannot talk about things," Sir Hugh went on. "I mean in words—but I want you to know that I absolutely understand, and oh! my dear little pale lady, I would do anything in the world for you."

"Thank you—that makes me happy to feel that," and then I changed the topic. I asked him if he did think I would have been better if I had been knocked about by brothers—if it was that perhaps which made me seem so unsatisfactory to Humphrey. "I had one brother, you know," I told him. "He died—when I was fourteen. But I was so delicate as a little girl, he was always very tender and kind to me. Bob was his name—Bob Ferrers. He was in the Eton Eleven, and might have been captain if he had lived."

"Bob Ferrers!" cried Sir Hugh. "Why, he was there with me in the same house—one of my dearest friends. And he was your brother! To think I never knew that! And I have known Lady Langthorpe for quite ten years, but I never connected her with him. How stupid one is—if one is not specially interested."

"I loved Bob very much," I said. "He and I were such chums after my mother died and Letitia married. You cannot think what dreadful grief it was to lose him; I did not really care what happened then——"

"Oh! you poor little lonely child!" he whispered gently. "And at sixteen you were married off to the General. It was a crime. How could you know your own mind at that age!"

I did not say my mind had not been consulted. I just looked away over the beautiful scene.

"It is such a very strange thing," he went on, "how fond Fate seems of throwing the wrong people into bonds, and letting the right people meet—too late."

"Perhaps girls do not have much opportunity of meeting the really nice men," I suggested. "They never seem to

want to talk to them or find out if they would be agreeable women some day—so I suppose the girls just drift into marriage with some callow youth, or elderly man—and often the nice men then are caught by impossible thistledowns who make them pay for all the hearts they have caused to ache."

"I cannot think of a greater hell on earth," Sir Hugh said fervently, "than to be married to some empty-headed miss who would not understand a word one said to her. It could be an awful tie, marriage—or an exquisite bliss—if the woman was loving and kind and true, and sympathized with one's real tastes."

"Yes," I answered, "that sounds ideal. I am perhaps very unorthodox in saying that I think it is hard that the tie must go on forever until death do them part—or be broken by disgrace. Surely, if people have borne it bravely for ten years, say, they might be allowed to go free after that without any scandal."

"It is a difficult question—some solution will be evolved some day, I suppose, to level things. Meanwhile, here we are!" and Sir Hugh sighed.

"My sister Letitia has all sorts of common-sense views upon life. Have you ever talked to her about them?" I asked.

"I do not know that I have, but I expect she holds the same as we all do. There is far too much altruistic nonsense preached by the hypocrites. Human nature will out."

"Yes—I fear so," I agreed.

He looked at me strangely—then he said with gravity:

"I wonder so much if you will ever let the real you live. I wonder if some day the barriers will be burst that hold that beautiful soul in check."

I felt troubled. "Do not speculate so, Sir Hugh. It frightens me, and I am trying to live my life." Then I got up from the seat and cried, "Oh! it is the happy spring-time. Let us go out in the sun and try to be young like the season, and laugh and not look ahead!"

"Yes, you are wise," he answered. "Forgive me—I was growing into a bore. But you have the extraordinary quality of making me feel that the only thing which matters is to get at all your thoughts and feelings. I have an intense desire to be near you—I meant to stay in London until Whitsuntide, but I could not; it was like some magnet drawing me back here. So I made Adelaide come down with me, and arranged to-day, just for this hour alone with you under the sky."

I trembled all over. What did this mean? Oh! I could not think or listen—my only course was to divert it lightly aside and keep to the rôle of the gaiety of the spring-time. So I turned a smiling face to him and walked on quickly.

"I am just a country neighbor, Sir Hugh! You must be careful, or all these nice things that you are saying will go to my head!"

He strode beside me—and he frowned.

"I cannot bear you to talk like that," he announced. "It is not the least natural to you, and you know it. You also know that they are not 'nice things' I have been saying, but the truth wrenched from my heart."

"Then you must not voice them," I said. "Now you have spoilt my happy walk. Let us go back to the house."

But he stopped suddenly and put his hand on my arm.

"No, please—not that. Forgive me—I will indeed try to be more controlled. I have calculated that my sister will keep the General interested for quite an hour—then she was going to propose showing him the new peach-houses, so that we have at least half an hour more to ourselves. Tell me that I can make you happy for that little time."

I thought to myself that it would not be difficult for him to make any woman happy— for all her life, but I only said aloud:

"Show me some other of your haunts, then."

We strolled on to a very tall hedge of clipped yew, and through a wrought-iron gate in it with a screen of yew planted inside, cut into a weird shape. He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the gate, and held it while I passed through, and found myself, when I got behind the screen, in a garden entirely surrounded on three sides by the yews, except in the middle of the end one, where they are cut into two hooded niches showing the most divine view between with a raised marble balustrade and curved seats. The ground beyond slopes away beneath, and has been artificially lowered, so that the outlook seems to be perched above the world, on a level with the tree-tops of the vast park. Down stone steps at the right-hand side of one bower, almost concealed in the yews, there is a small door which opens, I imagine, into the park. The fourth side of the garden is filled in by a wing of the house—its tall, narrow windows opening on to a terrace of marble.

"This is my own particular part of my abode," Sir Hugh said. "Those windows are my sitting-room, and a private staircase goes up to my bedroom above."

"How enchanting!" I exclaimed. "To be all alone where no one can get to you unless you wish! By the sun, the aspect must be due west. Is this the roof I can just see when I look east from my turret chamber, then?"

"Yes, and every morning I look out, and know that beyond the trees there is a lady in a Moated Grange whom I would like to fly to."

We walked up the beautiful green lawn to the marble terrace, where there were comfortable cushioned chairs. Here he paused and spoke:

"Come in and see my sitting-room, and tell me what you think of it." And he held back the curtain for me to pass.

"Ah! this is perfect!" I could not help exclaiming, when we got inside.

It is a very tall room, most beautifully panelled, and with low book-cases runnning all round, and a few good pictures above—Dutch interiors and Van der Veldes mostly. Everything is restful, from the huge green leather chairs to the soft tone of the russet silk curtains—restful and rich and refined. There are no knick-knacks about, but a few exquisite bronzes. It is eminently a man's room, though there are no antlers or guns or swords, such as Humphrey likes to surround himself with. These trophies of the chase we discovered in an ante-room beyond, devoted to all sorts sporting mementoes.

"It is quite perfect," I said again when we returned.

"Will you stand still like that—there by the window for a moment," Sir Hugh pleaded, "and let me take a snapshot of you with the light coming down on your hair? I have a wonderful camera for interiors, and if you would remove that hat you would be a sweet lady."

I laughed. "What a schoolboy you are, after all, Sir Hugh! wanting to take photographs at once!" But I unpinned my felt sombrero and put it on a table.

"And the coat, too?" he demanded, helping me to pull it off. "Now you are—homelike. I want a picture of you that I can look at with the background of my own room—it will comfort me in moments when I am hungry—and help me to visualize a dream of what it would be like, if you were here always."

I could not speak—a sudden exquisite joy silenced words, and for a while the reaction of pain did not set in.

He quickly got his camera and took a number of pictures in different positions, then he put in another set of plates and asked me to sit in a big chair and take a book.

"I want to pretend we need not hurry, and that you are resting and reading for as long as you like."

He attended strictly to his business, as photographic artist, until this set, too, was complete, and then he came over to the chair, and, taking my hand, he kissed it with homage.

"Thank you, sweet Mistress Guinevere," he said.

I cannot tell of the new feelings which were rushing through me—of happiness and pleasure and contentment and—at last—sorrow. A cloud came over the afternoon sun, and I shivered. I do not know why. Then I looked up at him standing there so tall and fine.

"Sir Hugh, please—we must return to the others now," I faltered in a half voice. "And oh! please—you must go back to London—soon."

"Darling!" he whispered and started forward nearer to me, and then he pulled himself together, and without speaking further helped me on with my coat. But both of us were trembling—and we did not say a word more until we were back beyond the wrought-iron gates again, when he turned to me and whispered, in a hoarse, strangled voice:

"What you ask is hard—but I will go."

And so we came to the morning-room windows and saw the sardonic face of Humphrey.

CHAPTER IX

JUNE, 1905

OH! the days that pass! The same thing always: the same duties, the same afternoon drives, the same meals with their jarred conversations, the same evenings, throbbing my heart out at the piano while my husband dozes in his chair! I have tried so hard to discipline myself. I have taken a whole course of stiff reading, and I have played tennis for hours with Algernon.

We have entertained the neighbors, too, at a ceremonious dinner party, and some of Humphrey's old friends have been asked on two separate Saturdays to Mondays. But a blank weariness is over everything, alternating with fits of meaningless excitement, and I cannot shake it off. I do not allow myself to look much from the east window, though I know the flag of the Dremonts has never waved from over the trees all this time. But Humphrey heard at the bench on Saturday that a large party was coming for Whitsuntide, which falls late this year. I suppose they will be of the same set as the race-week one, but my sister Letitia will be among them. She has written to me several times with accounts of her doings. She has often met Sir Hugh, it appears, who has taken to going out again and is seen at all the great houses.

I wonder if I should like a real season in London. Not that I am ever likely to have one now; Humphrey says his London days are over, and he means to remain always at Redwood Moat. But next year I shall have to go to a Court again—he likes me to do everything that is correct. He himself is settling down into quite a country gentleman, and his temper has been rather better since that last attack of gout. It came out, and he was really ill for a week after we lunched at Minton Dremont—and so the worst was over.

There is such a strange side of him which this place seems to have awakened. He is actually jealous of everything about it, and unconsciously resents my taking any practical interest in it. It has come to such a pass that I dare not remark upon anything, and am gradually growing to be a sort of visitor in the house; no one knowing our daily lives could possibly imagine that I am the mistress of it.

Algernon is having a tutor now until he goes to Eton in the autumn—a young man who lodges in the town and comes out every day, so that I see very little of my son except on Sundays.

The melancholy of my rooms is in tune with my thoughts, and I no longer want to move from them. It is all too ridiculous, though. I dislike melancholy people to meet, and despise those who give way to brooding. Sir Hugh has probably forgotten his momentary emotion by now, and at all events he has the consolation of great divertisement.

The guests at Minton Dremont arrive on Saturday, the day after to-morrow, and just now Humphrey came out here in the garden where I am sitting, a letter in his hand.

"From Hugh Dremont," he said, "concerning the keeper I wrote to him about. At the end he sends apologies to you for not writing his invitation to you, and asks if we will dine on Tuesday. Jack Kaird will be with him, and he thinks I'd like to see him again; so I would—dear old Jack!"

"Yes, that will be nice, to see Sir John again," I agreed. "The dear old man! And he will be pleased to see his godson." Sir John is Algernon's godfather.

"Then you can answer the note—my hand is stiff to-day. Thank him about the keeper, and say we accept."

"Where must I address the letter?" I asked.

He looked at the paper and found it was written from the Turf Club. "Send it there," he returned.

I went back into the house and up to my little room, and then wrote a stiff reply, which on my return to the garden I was placing in the bag when Humphrey crossed the hall.

"What did you say?—show me," he asked. "I did not tell you plain enough about Hedson, the keeper, I think."

I handed him my letter, and he broken open the envelope. How fortunate that the acceptance was not couched in more expansive language!

"You are extraordinarily stiff, Guinevere," my husband remarked. "Sir Hugh has been very civil to you, considering, as your sister told me, how wrapped up he is in that Mrs.

Dalison—and even though it is only for my sake he has been nice, you need not be so chilly."

"Surely that will do," I answered; "I cannot be bothered writing it over again." And I went to the table and addressed a new envelope, and once more put the letter in the bag.

Humphrey looked at me.

"You are certainly the most uninteresting iceberg I've ever met," he announced. "It is remarkable to me how any man could bother with you."

Once upon a time this very rude speech would have hurt me, but now I seem absolutely indifferent to everything any one says—it just sounded as so many words, that is all.

I am excited, with a sick sense of excitement which I cannot control. I own it to myself.

. . . . . .

I got a note sent over from Letitia on Sunday morning, saying she would come and see me after church. Sir Hugh does all of his country duties well, so he would probably go to church—and some of his guests would be sure to accompany him. They did—the Duchess and Lady Marjoribanks, and two others, but not Mrs. Dalison. I was glad of that. Perhaps she is not there this time.

He was sitting where I could not see anything but the back of his head, and that gave me a strange thrill. How foolish I am!

The party came up to talk to us on the path when we came out, and Letitia linked her arm in mine and drew me on ahead. But at the gate Sir Hugh overtook us again, and said if we would take my sister, he would accompany the other ladies back, and then come and fetch her in the motor. They were not going to lunch until quarter to two, so there would be plenty of time.

His manner was perfectly cool and casual to me; he seemed to have completely recovered from any emotion he may have felt. I have some pride, at all events, and it took fire immediately, so that I was able to be quite friendly and casual, too, and even Letitia could not discover anything as she glanced at us with the corner of her eye.

"You look extremely attractive, Guinevere, you know," she told me after we had talked some while up in my turret room. "You seem to have got some better clothes than usual. But you are awfully pale, dear, as white as a Carl Drushki rose, which is just what you remind me of—like

the one in your belt. And how goes everything? And you have never let me hear how you got on with Hugh Dremont that afternoon I left you alone together."

"We got on quite well," I said, sitting down in the northern window-seat. "He is very nice, isn't he?"

"Yes," answered Letitia, looking at me hard. "But when he manœuvres to spend hours with a woman—he asked me to take Humphrey and Algernon off, you know—he generally makes more impression upon her than he seems to have done upon you. Did you snub him frightfully? Something must have occurred to drive him up to London; he has not been there for three weeks on end like this, now, for more than two years."

"We lunched with him when his sister was down here; he seemed quite pleasant and agreeable then. I think you weave meanings into things, Letitia," I said.

But she shook her head.

"It all seems to me very strange. Perhaps seeing your domestic bliss with Humphrey has inspired him with the idea of marrying. He is quite finished with Mrs. Dalison, and has not selected any one else—though Winnie Latrobe was sure her turn would come."

"Oh, it really is too silly how Sir Hugh seems so important to you all!" I cried. "Why can't he be left in peace to do what he pleases, without being watched and speculated about all the time?"

"My dear child," my sister said wisely, "Sir Hugh, besides having a peculiar personal attraction, is colossally rich, and possesses the nicest house for our *rendezvous* in the whole of England. We have not the slightest intention of letting him marry outside our circle, if we can prevent it. Ada was talking to me about it only last night, and saying if he seems restless we had almost better encourage him to look at the Duchess's girl, who is as dull as an owl, and keep him in the family."

"Letitia, have you all no sense of humor?" I asked, and made myself smile. "From the little I have seen of Sir Hugh, I should say he did not care one snap for any of your opinions or intentions for him, and was a perfectly independent character."

"So he is; but if ten or twelve women who are his constant companions determine upon a thing, the current is too strong for one man to resist, unless he is aware they are plotting and so be on his guard—and we have all been so

awfully clever, poor Hugh has not an idea that sometimes we lead him by the nose!"

A sensation of bitter cynical disgust crept over me. Sir Hugh could not be so fine as I thought him if he could not see through these ladies who are his friends.

I laughed aloud, and I hated the sound of my own mirth—it seemed to wither the whiteness of my roses there in the great bowl. They were the first ones out, and I had only been able to gather a few of them.

"I suppose Humphrey would not let you come and spend a week with me in town?" my sister asked. "I believe it would do you good, Guinevere."

"I do not think you had better suggest it," I replied; "not yet, at any rate. Since his last attack of gout he has been extremely difficult. I would rather drone on—now that the warm weather has come—than have any rows."

Just then my maid came to the door from the bedroom—there is no approach for men-servants to this room. Parton said Hartington had just sent up to say Sir Hugh had arrived in the motor for Lady Langthorpe, and would we descend.

So we went down the turret stairs and found him alone in the drawing-room. Humphrey was somewhere out in the grounds, it appeared.

"Don't you think my sister looks very pale, Hugh?" Letitia asked him while she put on her gloves. "I do not believe this place suits her. All that water under her windows, and the horrid gloom of the whole thing. I wish we had her with us at Minton Dremont for this Whitsuntide, where it is all gay and bright."

"So do I," he answered, but reservedly and without enthusiasm. "I fear the General would not consent, though, and would not himself be willing to come out."

"We are very well here," I said, "thank you both. I am growing quite accustomed to the things that seemed dark at first—the place is getting to suit me."

"Or you it," retorted Letitia, "which is the aspect of the case which causes me concern. But I suppose there is no use interfering with other people—and we must be off, or we shall be late for lunch."

Sir Hugh never looked at me—he seemed anxious to hurry my sister into the motor and get away. Why he came at all for her, instead of just sending the car, I do not know.

When they had gone an icy sense of loneliness crept over me, so that I held Petrov tight in my arms and caressed

him, but no comfort would come even from his velvet fur and affectionate joy.

At luncheon I forced myself to talk pleasantly, and Algernon unconsciously helped me out with precociously amusing remarks about a stout neighbor who had been in church. Humphrey enjoys obvious jokes like that. Then, afterwards, I went into the garden and made myself read a Life of Caterina Sforza which had just come in my last batch of books. It was like a tonic for me. She was no weakling, Madonna del Forli!

The Monday passed with no communication from Minton Dremont, and Tuesday has come. It is such glorious weather, without a breath of wind, that the flag—on the staff—hardly showed over the trees, when I looked from the east window just now. It has not taken the master of it long to forget the interest he manifested in the lady of Redwood Moat. It is hardly a month since he took the photographs in his sitting-room and called me—darling—in his attractive voice! I shook myself, and a feeling of furious contempt with myself came over me. Why had I ever been beguiled into friendliness with him, a man accustomed to the scheming adoration and incense of dozens of women? No doubt, when he felt he had added the scalp of this poor country creature to his belt, he troubled himself no more. Well, he shall see to-night that I am not wearing the willow for him. The Ferrers were not cheap people, accustomed to show their hurts; and though I have been a cowed prisoner for many years, the blood of my race still flows in my veins!

I have settled which frock I shall wear—a white and silver brocade which suits me—and I shall put a bright red rose at one side of my dark hair—a coquettish thing I am quite unaccustomed to; and, if only it will stay, there is a pink flush in my cheeks now, as I write late before dressing.

. . . . . .

I braved Humphrey's wrath and kept him waiting five minutes in the hall. We should not be the first to arrive this time, as usual. I felt so sick with excitement that I actually did not hear the words of his reproaches as we drove along, and just nodded my head when I thought I ought to; and, fortunately, a few people were in the drawing-room when we were announced, my sister among them.

Sir Hugh was being very gay, and our old friend Sir John Kaird came up and chaffed and greeted us affectionately. He had arrived in the afternoon, and was to take me in to dinner, it was arranged. Some of the other neighbors were

dining, too, so the party was a large one—only the Duchess was late and kept every one waiting, to Humphrey's intense disgust.

I was placed exactly opposite our host, and the low arrangement of the flowers would have allowed me to see him all the time if I had looked, which I determined not to do. There were four round tables, of ten each. Ours seemed to be a very merry one. I do not know what spirit possessed me, but I became quite another person to my usual self—full of repartee with Sir John and even a little encouraging to the young man who sat on the other side of me. I felt my cheeks burning and my heart beating until, just as the ices were being removed, I met Sir Hugh's eye, and it was full of wrath and astonishment—and pain!

Wrath and astonishment would have pleased me, but what could the pain mean? All the bravado seemed to die out of me suddenly; a laugh to my neighbor grew silent on my lips, and I was so glad that the dinner was almost over and we should be moving to the other room.

I did not dare to glance at our host, and eventually followed Letitia's blue train into the drawing-room without again having looked over to him.

My sister endeavored to draw me into the circle of her intimates, and I must say they seemed as though they were trying to be more agreeable to me; but what she said, or I said, or any of them said, is all a blank to me now as I look back over the gulf that has separated my life from yesterday evening.

Sir Hugh always has some musicians down for these parties, Letitia told me, and soon they began to play out in the gallery of the saloon, and we went in there, and the men joined us. The young man—Mr. Angerstein, I think his name was—who had sat next to me at dinner rushed upon me from the throng, and his attitude was *empressé,* and his looks much interested as he sprawled with modern unconcern beside me on the sofa. And once more I caught Sir Hugh's eyes as he stood by a tall screen, making politenesses to Lady Essenden, and now all the other emotions were there but scorn was added—and this I could not bear.

The musicians then played a merry two-step. The servants had come in and cleared the saloon while we were at dinner; and Mr. Angerstein asked me to dance. So we started, but after one turn we were stopped by our host. Every one else was dancing, except Humphrey and the

Duchess's daughter and one or two other people who had gone off to bridge.

The saloon has long windows opening down to the ground, and when Sir Hugh accosted us we had stopped by one of them.

"You go on, Jim," he said chaffingly, "and take Miss Joan, who is looking daggers at you. I want a turn with Mrs. Bohun myself."

And the young man had to relinquish me with what grace he could.

Miss Joan Moburn is Mr. Angerstein's *fiancée*, its seems!

When he had got rid of them, Sir Hugh did not suggest dancing; on the contrary, he drew me out of the window on to the terrace, and then in at another in the next room, from which he opened double doors, shutting them after us, and I found we were in the ante-chamber where the trophies of sport hang—and so we came to his sitting-room. The russet silk curtains were drawn, but by their movements one could see the windows were open beyond.

Only a single large shaded electric lamp burned, and the high dark walls were all in shadow. Why I had allowed him to bring me here I do not know—one is not always master of oneself in supreme moments of one's life.

He turned and faced me when we stood upon the great lion-skin hearth-rug, and his eyes were blazing and his face very pale.

"My God!" he said sternly, "how can you expect me to bear it! I went away because I love you so madly, and now you torture me and play with another man under my eyes."

A wild, unreasoning joy rushed through me—a joy which blinded the remembrance of any to-morrows, and I dared no longer look at him, but lowered my head.

"Guinevere," he went on, "this hideous ache and uncertainty cannot continue—I will not suffer it. For God's sake tell me what is in your heart, since I have told you all of mine!" And there was a sob in his deep voice.

I was trembling now with passionate emotion. I could hardly answer him, but I did, trying to call up the thought of all his other loves to aid my pride.

"Hush!" I whispered. "I cannot listen to you, because I am not like you, Sir Hugh, a being to whom love is only a game."

"Ah!" he cried. "How little you know me if you think that what I feel for you is a game. But perhaps you have the right to say that to me—these scorpion women have

poisoned your mind. And what they have told you is true, probably. Once before I said to you, it lies with the woman what effect she produces upon a man. Until I met you they had none of them been able to create more in me than a transient desire and a wish for constant change."

"But how can you tell the difference between your old emotions and this?" I said a little bitterly. I longed to believe him, for I knew, as he stood there so splendid and so deeply moved, that I loved him—with all my long-numbed heart.

"It is the difference between the sunlight and the darkness," he answered firmly. "You call from me everything that is good. Guinevere, do not play this comedy with me—it is unworthy of you pretending you do not understand."

"I do understand," I said, "but what can I answer to you? My life is already as full of pain as I can bear."

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, brokenly, and he leaned against the tall chimney-piece and covered his eyes with his hand. "That is the frightful price of it—the anguish to think I can bring more sorrow into your life; but it shall not be sorrow"—and he raised his head proudly— "I will not do anything which will cause you sorrow. Only tell me the truth. How much do I mean to you? How deep have I been able to grow in your heart?"

I put out my hands blindly, as if to ward off some danger, and he clasped them and pressed them fondly against his breast.

"Darling, tell me?" he pleaded gently; and all further resistance fled.

"You have filled the whole of it, Hugh," I whispered, hardly aloud. "So please take care of me and tell me what to do."

Joy lit all his dear face, and then with immense self-control he dropped my hands.

"We can live on that, then, for the present, my loved angel," he said. "The knowledge of this divine sweetness between us shall heal our hurts; and when the imperative necessity for more fulfilment comes, we must leave it to Fate."

"Yes," I answered, and we looked into each other's eyes, and for one brief second he folded me in his arms and tenderly kissed my hair.

Then we went back on to the star-lit terrace, where the company were, no one seeing from whence we had come.

And in our hearts there was the peace and beauty of the cloudless summer night.

CHAPTER X

JUNE, 1905

How good is the summer! It has none of the haunting mockery of the spring—or is it that my life is glorified and makes its own atmosphere of gladness? Perhaps with time some other aspect will affect me, but my happiness is as yet too recent to leave room for anything but sweetness. Can it be only three days ago that I felt disturbed and bitter and hopeless? How one causes oneself suffering through simple imagination! Hugh and I loved one another then as well as to-day, but all the jarring outside things hid the fact from us, and our imaginations had rendered us both miserable. But now, for the future, I will always try to see the real thing, and let the seeming go. And the real thing is that I am no more a lonely soul, drifting down the tide.

When we joined the rest of the company on the terrace on Tuesday night, we did not stay long there, but returned to the saloon through the same window, and Hugh relinquished me to another partner, and went his way to do his duty; and, but for a brief moment as we said good-night, he did not speak to me again, though once or twice during the evening he touched my hand in passing, or his eye met mine with a look of glad comprehension, and it was as if the angels' song still lingered in my ears.

"You are certainly improving, Guinevere," my sister told me before we left. "You look quite bright to-night, and have danced like a girl. I believe you have a great deal to tell me if you would."

And I laughed, and kissed her, and followed Humphrey to the carriage. He, too, had enjoyed himself, it appeared, and after his rubber of bridge had smoked for more than an hour with his old friend Sir John Kaird, whom he has

persuaded to come on to us to-morrow for a day or two, when his visit to Minton Dremont will be over.

"I suppose you danced, Guinevere," Humphrey said, "when you could find a partner."

"Yes," I answered. "One of two of the men were quite kind to me, and I enjoyed the pleasant exercise."

In some ways, because I have been married fourteen years, Humphrey thinks of me as a person as old as himself, and in others I am still, for him, a mere child. That I could ever have been supposed to have desired pleasure and gaiety, he never considered, even when I was not yet twenty.

I think, now, it was fortunate that I was so ignorant and undeveloped and terrified in those first days, because it caused him to suppress all signs of love-making very soon; and when I began to awaken a little, on account of the knowledge of life which I gained from my books and my observation, he had fallen into the habit of treating me as a daughter, and one who no longer interested him much, either. I fear I was a great disappointment to him—he has told me so continually—but as I had no choice in becoming his wife, I do not feel remorse for this.

It is a terrible sin, in my code of ethics, for human beings to force others into lives that are repugnant to them, and if a man does this, fate will make him pay the price. What right had these two men, for their own ends—my father for money and Humphrey for the gratification of a violent and sudden passion—what right, I say, had they to take my future and chain it with no chance of escape? It was hideous injustice. Well, they fettered my liberty and my outward actions, but they could not fetter my heart and my soul; these have been ever free and held in my own keeping, and now they have gone to him who has called them into life and joy and knowledge of their meaning—and I feel glorified, and not a sinner.

"Hugh Dremont loves me"—I say it over and over softly to myself as I look at his flag. "And oh! air and sky and trees, I love him in return!"

I am not going to look ahead; I am going to be happy in the present, and, like the birds and flowers and the trees, I too shall rejoice in the summer.

It is comfort enough to sit here and dream—to remember his looks and his words—his dear face moved, and his loved voice trembling. And they none of them matter, those scheming ladies! They may set their snares—in vain!

I shall not mind now if I do not often see him. The con-

sciousness that love is between us will suffice. I feel that I must be gentler, tenderer to the whole world—that is all. Love has melted my frozen heart and torn the sad gray veil from my eyes. Surely the roses are more perfumed—surely the sky is more blue—surely I am still young and comely!

Ah! this is the meaning of life.

. . . . . .

Just as I turned from the window, I heard voices coming into the turret stairs from the little library below, and I recognized them as Letitia's and—Hugh's.

"Guinevere!" my sister called. "May we come up? I told Hartington he need not send for you, I would fetch you myself." And, without waiting, she appeared through the narrow door, followed by her host.

"Hugh has been a perfect darling," she announced. "Brought me over to see you in the motor, and is going to let me go on in it to Mitley—it is only about fifteen miles, you know. And you must keep him here until I return. We crept away from the others while they had all dispersed, immediately after lunch, for letters or sleep."

"I am delighted to see you, Letitia," I said.

"Humphrey told us on Tuesday night that he had to go in to Wareford on county business to-day," she went on, "and would not be back until the evening; so, I thought as you would be alone and have nothing to do we would pounce upon you."

She sat down in the west window-seat for a minute while she looked round the room. Hugh stood leaning on the back of the big chair.

"You have got your tiny piano, I see," she laughed, "disguised under that piece of brocade. You might play to us a little; it is so soothing, and when I have had enough I'll slip away."

I sat down at once—and they were all joyous things which came to my finger-tips; and in a few minutes Letitia rose.

"There!" she said. "Now, Hugh, take me down and put me into the motor, and then you can come back again." And she kissed me and turned to the stairs.

And for those minutes while he was away, I was making up my mind.

The joy of having him up here in my own little shrine would be very great—but it certainly would not be prudent. I must take him back to the drawing-room, and

perhaps to the bench in the garden where the hedge of roses grows and the old sun-dial warns us op the passage of time.

But as I was thinking thus, he bounded up the stairs with the glad rush of a boy.

He came over to me where I stood looking out on the trees and he took and kissed my hand.

"I had to come," he whispered. "This glorious day seemed calling me to you. And then that dear sister of yours remembered that it would be possible, and suggested the way."

A perfectly delicious and tender thrill had seized me, and I could not raise my eyes to meet his.

"Darling," he gasped, "if you look down like that, I cannot remain as calm as I wish to be— Look at me, Guinevere."

So I did as I was bidden, and read all the tender passion he was feeling in that brief glance.

"Say that we absolutely understand one another," he commanded fondly; and I answered:

"I feel we do, Hugh, and it is going to change everything, and make the gray shadows all golden."

"Sit down beside me in the east window-seat," he pleaded, "just for a moment; and let us look over the tree-tops together to my home. Guinevere—I love you so."

He took my hand and drew me to the low sill and sat down beside me—so close that he touched me, and I shivered with the emotion it caused me.

"Hugh," I whispered, "No—we must not stay here. Oh! I asked you to take care of me—and all this that I am feeling frightens me. Let us go into the garden, Hugh——"

"Darling"—and he looked into my eyes with grave tenderness—"do not fear."

But a wild longing for I know not what—to be folded to his heart, I think—convulsed me, and I started to my feet, and led the way down the turret stairs and so out into the glorious sunlight, and to the old bench by the sundial.

He followed me without a word.

I picked a red rose nervously, and stuck it in my belt. My foolish heart was still beating tempestuously, and I could not speak; but my emotion was all joy.

Then we sat down beside each other at last, and there was a happy silence between us, while Hugh seemed to be taking in every line of me. I could feel his eyes penetrating me as

I looked down and played with another rose. Then we began to talk.

We spoke shyly at first, like two children, but afterward we opened our hearts to each other and told of the thoughts of our souls.

We did not speak directly again of love—our personal love, I mean—but all the under-meaning of things was full of tenderness.

Then we talked of the books which please us, and he asked me if I would let him give me some.

"It will make me happy, Guinevere, if I may. To a man it is always a pleasure to give what she cares for to the woman he loves. It is one of the instincts in the male character; he likes to feel that he has a right to provide her with all material things. It is so interesting to trace instincts, and what they go back to."

"Yes," I agreed. "And that instinct in man goes back, I suppose, to the time when outward things were his only means of showing the rest of the tribe that a woman was his belonging, as the trappings on his horse showed it was his also."

"Probably—but civilization has spiritualized the feeling with us; that being the foundation, we have woven into it the joy that she whom we love shall touch and be surrounded by the things we have given her, that the link may be greater between us."

"I dare say some men who have sentiment think of it like that," I said; "but not many of them." And I thought of Humphrey, who is still at the tribal stage in his conception of women—solaces for the bodies of men, household drudges if financial circumstances make it necessary, and, in all cases, inferior beings.

Hugh looked away into distance, and my eyes followed his. There, to our left, was the old gray, forbidding pile, with its grim turret and narrow windows keeping guard, and in front of us, above the high garden wall, we could just see the roofs of the latter building, with the summer sky for background, and to the right, far blue hills. There was a warm hush over everything; nature seemed drowsing with happiness and peace.

"Guinevere," said Hugh, "is it not wonderful that it has taken us all these years to find each other, and that now we have so much to say, we hardly know where to begin?"

"I love to talk to you, Hugh," I said; and as I said it, he turned glad eyes to me and moved a little nearer on the seat.

"I have never had a friend before to whom I could really say my thoughts. I am always analyzing everything, and the meaning of things, and have no one to tell the conclusions I come to."

"I want to hear them on all subjects," he answered fondly. "I am sure they are all wise and true, and they have been accumulating in that dear little head for how many years!"

I thought for a moment. Then:

"Ten, at least," I told him. "For the first three or four after I was married, I do not think I developed at all. I was still like a child of fourteen, and just numb with the fear and horror of everything; and so very delicate—I never like to remember that time. But afterwards, when I lived at Bath with Humphrey's old sisters, then I used to read and think all day and most of the night."

He looked very interested, so I went on. "I read everything you can think of, and began to realize the deep injustice and the hideous hypocrisy of most civilized people's lives."

"Yes, we are all prisoners," he agreed, rather sadly. "But your life, which ought to have been surrounded with the tenderest care, was peculiarly harsh and barren. Oh! my dear, if I had only known you then!" And his voice was full of regret. "I am five years older than you. I was twenty-one when you were married. If Fate had let me ride by instead of the General!"

"You perhaps would not have cared at all for me—I was ridiculously shy and timid, and had not a word to say to any one. I think it is having been so lonely that has taught me things—cultivated me, perhaps, and turned me into that which pleases you now; so we must not regret anything."

"No, regrets are weakness. What I wish now is to make life fairer for you, if I can, with my sympathy and understanding. I promise I will try to keep my love for you within the bounds which cannot cause any sorrow. Darling, you are so fragile-looking and so utterly sweet, you appeal to everything that is strong and protective in a man."

"It will be happiness enough for me to know there is some one who cares for me," I said. "I do not desire anything more, Hugh. I have never loved any one in my life before—and I am nearly thirty-one!"

Such a strange look came into his face, of worship at first, and then he drew in his breath as though disturbed, and clasped his hands.

"Darling," he whispered, with his dear voice very deep, "you must help me to be always as you wish and to deserve this great gift." And then he stopped abruptly, as though afraid to continue the subject; and I knew that he was thinking, just as I was, that it would be very difficult to keep our emotions on the plane where they now were, and that we must help each other in this.

Then we spoke of Minton Dremont, after a little silence. Hugh loves his home profoundly, but to hear him talk among his guests, treating all subjects with a cynical gaiety, no one would imagine he felt so deeply, or had sentiment over anything.

It was nearly six o'clock when Letitia returned and came through the wrought-iron gates from the courtyard to join us, finding us pacing up and down the far walk which is bordered by old gnarled apple trees.

"You have had a peaceful time!" she laughed. "And now, Hugh, we ought to hurry, as I am afraid I have made you stay much too long away from your other guests; and, considering it is the last day of this delightful party, they will be sufficiently mad with me. Fortunately, there was a puncture as I arrived at Mitley—mended long before I thought of leaving, but we shall have to make the most of that!"

Letitia is so cheery always; she brings an atmosphere of material common-sense with her which is extremely good for me, and we all smiled gaily as they hurried off. Hugh and I had even forgotten to go into the house for tea, and as I got to the drawing-room alone, presently I saw Hartington had only sent up my small tray laid for one. Did he not realize, then, that I had had a visitor remaining after the motor had gone?

Letitia had left a note for Humphrey, which she said I was to give him, telling him she had brought it over herself; and when he and Algernon returned at about seven, I handed it to him.

"Letitia and Sir Hugh Dremont brought this," I said. "Letitia was on her way to Mitley in the motor. The party breaks up to-morrow, when Sir John comes to us."

If Humphrey had asked me any questions, I would have told the exact truth. I cannot bear subterfuge; and to be honest with myself, I even tried to word my announcement so that he could ask if he wished, but he made no remark as he opened the letter. I watched his face as he read, having

no idea what the contents could be. He frowned first, and then he smiled.

"You know all about this, of course, Guinevere," he said gruffly, but not in the snarling tone he uses when he is going to be disagreeable.

"No, I do not," I answered. "My sister handed me the letter as she was leaving. What is it about?"

He looked suspicious, as usual, but tossed me over the missive and sat down in his chair.

It was one of Letitia's masterpieces, a mixture of insidious flattery and cajolement, concealing the pith, which was to ask him to let her have me to stay with her in London for her ball, which happened to be coming off the following week. I had not stayed with her for three years, she pointed out, and never in London, and she would only keep me the inside of the week, as she herself would be leaving on the Saturday for a Sunday visit before Ascot began.

I made no remark whatever. Experience has taught me the wisest course is always silence, with Humphrey.

"Well?" he growled. "I suppose you want to go? You have been looking so damn pale and peaky lately, perhaps the change may buck you up a bit—make you less of a ghost. If you had even half your sister's vitality it would be a mercy——"

"Am I to accept, then?" I asked gently. "I would like to be with Letitia for a few days very much, if you will allow me to go."

"Do as you please," my husband returned. "If you don't want any more clothes. I have had quite enough expenses this year as it is."

"I do not require anything, thank you," I answered. "And I hope I may be less dull when I come back. I am afraid I have been tiresome, but I have been tired, or something silly. I will write to Letitia to-night; she will be so delighted, I know."

"Go and dress now," said Humphrey. "I won't be kept waiting for dinner in my own house while I am master of it." And then, as he got up and was going to the door that leads to his wing, he turned and looked at me critically, and, coming back, said discontentedly:

"Algernon is getting beyond himself. He was thunderingly impertinent at luncheon to-day. I won't let him dine down to-night, as he was promised. You ought to have some influence upon him, but you have none."

"I do not think any one will ever influence Algernon," I

sighed. "He is so like you, Humphrey, and you know you would never have let any woman influence you, I am sure, at any time of your life."

This pleased him, and he went off to dress, with that sardonic smile on his lips which I know means satisfaction—and I almost bounded up the stairs, two steps at a time, filled with the joy of my coming visit.

But when I got into my room, I heard a noise in the turret chamber, and went there to find Algernon standing staring out of the north window, and kicking the stone wall below the sill.

He turned, and his handsome face was dark with wrath.

"Father is a beast, mum!" he blurted out. "I hate him, don't you? And I wish he was dead."

Tears of rage were so near his big gray eyes, I longed to caress and comfort him.

"Darling!" I said, and held out my arms; and for once in his life my son let me clasp him and kiss his curly hair without my being rebuffed. Great sobs shook him, but his eyes were dry now.

"To insult me before the grooms!" he stammered. "To treat me as if I were still ten years old! He hit me with his riding whip, mother—in the inn yard at Wareford—and now he says I am to stay upstairs, like a baby! I won't bear it. Some day I will kill him, and then they will hang me, and that will be the end of the family. And a good thing, too!"

Oh! the anguish to hear him talk so—my dear boy! I forgot all the joy of my coming visit, and tried to soothe him with my sympathy, but I could not comfort him or bring another mood; and at last I was obliged to rush back to dress and go down and face Humphrey, a mad indignation in my heart.

CHAPTER XI

When one lives very much out of the world and suddenly comes into it, one is struck by the rust one has allowed to accumulate, even when, as in my case, my lonely mind is always occupied with books and ideas and not the ways of people. Still, introspection, on however broad lines it may be indulged in, is a warping occupation. And now that I have been for three days in Letitia's dazzling society of thrust and parry, rush and instantaneous decisions, I seem to place fresh values upon things and see everything with new eyes.

Letitia's set are brilliant creatures, many of them, not burdened with hearts or any inconvenient emotions which hamper their doings. They seem all so satisfied with pleasure that they turn to any new thing while it charms them, and then throw it away the moment it palls.

On the Monday evening when I arrived there was a dinner-party, and Hugh Dremont was one of the number of guests. I did not then know what was in my sister's mind upon the subject, and so behaved with my usual reserve. She had not put him next me, or anywhere near, and I never allowed my eyes to stray to his or my attention to wander from the most amusing young man who had taken me in. And once or twice, when I looked up at Letitia, I saw her glance fixed on me in a rather puzzled way.

We had only a short time in the drawing-room afterward before the men joined us, because we were all going on to a ball—a married ball, Letitia had told me, which would not bore me as most balls bored every one; and twelve or thirteen women had dined, so we only talked in small groups.

In ours Lady Marjoribanks was one of them, and the Duchess and two others. They no longer glanced at me suspiciously, as at first, and while ignoring me

as an inoffensive nonentity they were not unfriendly.

They spoke of everything with unconscious cynicism. The Duchess, it appeared, had been getting up a huge charity ball for some time, which she had made every Jewess and amenable foreigner climbing into the sacred portals of society in England take tickets for, and bring parties to, and then, at the last moment, had not gone herself.

"I do think you should have shown up, Ermyntrude," Lady Marjoribanks announced. "We must play the game now, with the Radicals coming in, or we shall lose our influence. I am all for making these creatures pay for their footing among us, but you should have given them some return. Numbers of them must have heard that your whole party went off to Earl's Court and exploited the water chute and flying boats. You might have gone into the Grafton Galleries for a few minutes."

"Darling, we weren't dressed, don't you see?" the Duchess murmured plaintively. "I had forgotten all about the horrid ball, and Charlie Vernaby had had a delightful river lunch party, which we got back so late from we all decided to finish the evening together before coming home to dress for Winnie's midnight Cotillon. So we went into Earl's Court just as we were, and quite enjoyed ourselves. I never remembered until next morning, when I read the papers. One of those horrible half-penny rags was quite rude about it, and I had to make my secretary write an explanation and smooth the thing down."

"Ermyntrude, you are incorrigibly vague," Letitia said, "but it is one of your charms."

"Hugh has got an absent look in his eyes. I noticed it at dinner," Lady Marjoribanks now remarked in a slightly lower tone, to my sister. "What does this portend, do you think? Winnie felt quite sure of him before Whitsuntide, but something must have happened, for, as you know, nothing advanced during the week."

"He is only having a breathing space," Letitia said. "Winnie will secure him all right if she does not hurry him—unless I have a look in myself," and she laughed gaily, knowing they all knew she was otherwise engaged for the moment, and had no intention of re-cutting for partners in the game of flirtation until the season should be over.

"Was there any one at Mitley the day you took him there, pet?" the Duchess joined in. "That was mean of you to keep him the whole afternoon."

"Yes," Letitia admitted, with apparent reluctance. "There

was a new American staying in the house, very pretty and divinely dressed—I thought her dangerous at the time."

This announcement was greeted with cries of interest, and the group drew together to hear of their possible common enemy, while an exquisite sense of mirth and mischief crept over me, as I sat very quietly on the sofa. What would they all have said had they known that Sir Hugh had never gone to Mitley at all, but had spent the time in the walled garden with me? But beyond the mirth there came a sense of the necessity for caution. Letitia must guess something, and she would never trouble to imply a false presumption like this to her dear friends if she did not think the matter grave enough to justify it. I must hardly even speak of Hugh before any of them; that was clear.

He came straight over to me when the men entered the room, and there was a hungry light in his dear eyes. But I was like marble, and with new-born resource whispered behind my fan before he could speak.

"Please don't take any notice of me—I will tell you why if we have a chance," and I turned away and pretended to be interested in old Colonel Hardwicke, a wit of Humphrey's date. Hugh moved on and sat beside Lady Marjoribanks, as though it had been his original intention, and a gleam of satisfaction shone in her narrow eyes.

The sense of mischief and fun did not leave me, and Letitia linked her arm in mine and drew me into the conservatory for a second as we were all preparing to go downstairs and start for the ball.

"Guinevere," she whispered, "you are much cleverer than I thought. Keep it up the whole evening, dear. I will explain to Hugh, and he will come and breakfast with us alone to-morrow. They are all on the *qui vive*, as you can see, and it would be fatal to give them any scent so soon."

The result of this was that at the ball Hugh never came near me, and I did not enjoy myself; after the first excitement of the situation was over, a dull longing for his voice and companionship crept over me. It would not be much satisfaction only to be able to look him all the time, I felt.

At supper we did chance to be at the same table. The ball was at a great house, with everything most beautifully done, and our table was up in a corner; but the man whom I had gone in with—the same who had been my partner at dinner—did not give me the opportunity to exchange

remarks with my neighbors, and as we all got up and Hugh passed me, he, for one second, surreptitiously grasped my hand so forcefully that it hurt. Then joy came back again. The strong touch conveyed comfort—he, too, was feeling that the restrictions of the evening were beginning to be unbearable.

I was standing with the Duchess for a moment afterward when he came up and chaffed with her, and then, in an indifferent and rather bored tone, he said, as though duty forced him:

"I hope you like London, Mrs. Bohun. You are staying with your sister, I suppose?"

"Yes," I answered demurely, and he went on:

"Would you care to see the famous Watteaus? There is not such a crush now." And, as the Duchess's partner came to claim her, he and I moved to the door, and, finding two seats on a sofa in a little boudoir down the gallery, we sank into them.

"This is driving me perfectly mad, darling," Hugh said. "I could not stand it a moment longer. I felt murderous toward all my old friends." Then he looked away indifferently as two of them entered the room.

"Letitia will be angry with me, I am afraid, if we stay more than a minute together," he went, "but I had to bring you here, just to tell you I love you, again—and you look like the sweetest white rose. I am coming to breakfast at ten to-morrow morning, on my way from my ride. Say you hate all this, too, and would much rather be with me all alone."

How his words thrilled me! But Lady Latrobe, the "Winnie" who has marked him out for her prey, was facing us, and I felt the whole of my arts would be needed not to betray the smallest interest. So I said I thought Letitia wished to go on now, and we had better look for her. Then I rose, and, when my face could no longer by observed, I faltered, "Yes—but you know it, Hugh."

With this sweet knowledge between us, we returned to the ballroom and stood a moment indifferently, and Letitia came up, and Hugh joined the Duchess again, and soon we started for home.

In her electric brougham Letitia grasped my hand.

"Guinevere," she said, "I am not going to ask you a single question, dear, but you can infer that I know exactly where Hugh Dremont's much sought-after glance is desiring to turn. Well—they won't let you keep him in peace if they

ever know. I had one moment of difficulty with them to-night, as you must have observed, and had to tell some fearful fibs. You will be careful—won't you, child?"

"There is nothing to be careful about, Letitia," I said. "I like Sir Hugh very much, and he likes me, I think—that is all."

"Guinevere, you will make me angry if you go on pretending so," my sister said sternly for her. "Hugh is not nearly so silly—he realizes that to see you at all he must trust some one, and he knows me well enough, even though you do not appear to do so, to be able to trust me."

"Oh, Letitia, I did not mean not to trust you. Forgive me," I implored her.

"Well, now we understand one another, dear," she returned, giving my hand a squeeze, "so we need not say any more. Only, don't take it all too seriously, that is all I ask. Hugh is frightfully attractive, and I do think he is really in love with you—for the first time in his life——"

"How am I not to take it seriously, then, Letitia? As you say, he is frightfully attractive," I sighed. "I am afraid to look ahead for a moment. We have settled to be friends and help one another, and just for a little while I want to be happy with that."

"So you shall," Letitia assured me, "as long as you are with me, at least, dear. And when you go back to your prison-house, you must manage how you can. I think you are too proud ever to make a scandal, and after to-night we won't talk of anything like this. Believe me, I quite understand."

Next morning I was dressed at ten o'clock and had gone down into my sister's sitting-room, where a cozy breakfast was already laid out—her house is in Norfolk Street, and her rooms look out on the Park—and presently she came in, in a ravishing confection of lace and chiffon, blooming like a ripe peach.

"If it had only been any one else but Hugh," she said, as she kissed me good morning, "we could have had the most enchanting parties of four, Guinevere—I and my amusing friend, and you and yours. But I dare not even trust Albert with such an exciting fact as Hugh's admiration for you, because, although he would not say a word now, perhaps, or ever intend to, Ada would certainly get it out of him in the autumn. I shall most likely have finished with him by then, and she always extracts every one's minutest secrets when the disconsolate ones go to her for consolation in

between their *affaires.* She is quite good-natured with us, though—Ada—but she would never forgive me if she found out I had hoodwinked her about Hugh."

"I expect these little intrigues are a diversion for you all," I said; "otherwise you would be so frightfully tired of the same round, year after year." And I looked out of the window at the green June trees, and tried to banish the jar that these cynical reflections caused me. The thought that Hugh and I were being "arranged for"—like the rest, our meetings connived at, even by own sister—fretted my spirit. It turned the whole thing into something commonplace, something akin to the flirtations of the world which I had hitherto despised. Letitia divined my thoughts, it would appear, for she laughed softly.

"Darling goosie!" she said. "In all affairs of the heart, you must above all things keep your head. I could not possibly enjoy my very agreeable life as I do, if I held your romantic notions. Instead of which, I amuse myself and take an artistic pleasure out of managing each of my fancies with consummate skill." And she laughed her rich, happy laugh again. "But, to continue with what I was saying; we can't have parties of four, so while you are here, pet, I am going to devote myself to your interests alone, and if I do not send you back to Redwood looking a new creature, I shall be much disappointed."

Before I could say anything in reply, Louise, Letitia's elderly French maid, came in to say the butler had just sent a message from Sir Hugh Dremont, asking if he might come up for a moment, as he was frightfully hungry after his ride, and wanted some food.

All the servants seemed to know Hugh, and Louise's face was beaming.

"You don't mind, Guinevere," Letitia asked innocently, do you? I want to settle about the Opera to-night with Hugh. Louise, tell Purfleet to order fresh coffee and some very crisp bacon. Sir Hugh always asks for that, you know." And when the maid had retired, my sister smiled. "Langthorpe and Hugh constantly ride together early, and often breakfast with me up here. It is not at all unusual, child," she said.

My brother-in-law is away at Newmarket for a day or two, seeing his horses, and we are alone.

I had conquered my sense of jar, and felt a shy happiness when Hugh, tall and distinguished in his perfect riding clothes, came into the room.

He had that fresh, exquisitely *soigné*, outdoor look which is so attractive, and Letitia's dog gave little barks of welcome, and her piping bull-finch set up his tiny song, and Hugh's dark-blue eyes were glad and laughing like a boy's, as he greeted us in his casual, delightful way.

"Purfleet tells me my bacon is coming," he said, as he sat down at the little table. "Have you told your sister how I dash in now and then and eat you out of house and home?"

Our breakfast was so merry—the change and relief after the sombre and often thunderous morning meals at home! Letitia and Hugh chaffed about everything of the night before: their whole set's doing, and then the political news of the morning; and finally they began about our future arrangements.

"Guinevere is only going to be allowed to stay until Saturday, you know, Hugh, and to-day is Tuesday. Just as a favor to me, think out four days of amusement for her. There is my ball to-morrow night, and Ada's on Thursday—we must go to—but I can get out of anything to-night and Friday, although both are filled up, if you can devise something thrilling. There is a moon, and it might be nice if you gave those dull Northumberland neighbors of yours a dinner on one of the evenings, at Maidenhead, and we had a river party. The son rather amuses me in his bucolic way, while the sister and her *fiancé* would make the six. Guinevere has never been on the river—have you, dear?"

"Never," I agreed, while I thrilled at the picture this called up.

"We can motor down in the afternoon," said Hugh. "I'll go and find the Northeys when I leave. It is a brilliant idea. They are only up for Ascot, and do not know a soul; they will certainly be able to come, I expect. We ought to have a jolly day."

"That is settled, then, for Friday," Letitia affirmed. "But there is all to-day and to-night. You have often been seen at the Opera with me before, Hugh, haven't you? But one can't talk there, in any peace. Supposing you and Guinevere motored down to Richmond with a picnic basket, and had a little meal—about seven o'clock in the Park? There are lots of nice places. You could get back by nine, and either, or both, could join me then at the Opera, where I shall go in my box with Beatrice Trehearn."

I had a shrewd suspicion that they had discussed and arranged the whole of these things beforehand, and this comedy of Letitia's suggestions was only for my benefit.

But by this stage some feverish excitement was possessing me, and I no longer cared whether they had or had not. If Fate, and not any of my own doings, had thrown this chance of happiness into my lap, I would be a fool not to take advantage of it. So I acquiesced in everything they evolved for my diversion, and presently Hugh got up to leave us.

"We are all lunching at Winnie's, aren't we?" my sister said, while Hugh kissed her hand. "Then Guinevere and I must pay some calls; but I shall drop her at Victoria, and you can pick her up there and return her safely here by nine o'clock. It will hardly be dark then, and, as I said before, there is a moon."

When he had left us, Letitia came over close to me as I stood looking out of the window, and put her hand on my shoulder.

"We will take a thick chiffon veil, Guinevere," she said, "in the electric broughham. Hugh will be sure to have put in an extra coat for you in his motor. He will probably drive himself, so you won't be bothered with a chauffeur. You ought to have an enchanting afternoon, dear, and any one of us would give half a life-time to be in your place—with Hugh—not schemed for, and caught—but eager and making all the difficulties smooth, himself. It was hardly my brain which devised this charming outing for you, you may guess! But appearances must be kept up." Then she laughed and went off to dress, leaving me standing looking out upon the Park, where the trees seemed to have taken on a fresh note of green.

CHAPTER XII

Some days are marked out in one's life as blessed by the gods; but this one at first seemed as if it would not be so. The few moments while I put on my veil at Victoria Station waiting-room, after Letitia had left me, were exceedingly unpleasant to me. I felt humiliated when I ought to have taken it all as a delicious escapade and joke. But I trembled and shook, and felt hot and cold, and as if every human being knew me and intended to tell Humphrey.

Hugh did not keep me waiting a single second, and wore goggles himself and was unrecognizable as he helped me into a big coat of his; and we got off almost wordless, and spun along among the traffic. I have hardly ever been in a motor before, and the fast passage through the air gave me pleasure and steadied my nerves. But I felt I had not a single thing to say, and we hardly exchanged a sentence until we turned into Richmond Park. Then he looked down at me, and asked in an anxious voice if I were well—I had been so very pale at luncheon at Lady Latrobe's, and not daring even to look at me much had irritated him so.

"Yes, I am quite well," I said, and fell into silence again. I could not see the expression of his face under that mask, and presently we stopped, by a great clump of trees, and an old groom came forward and touched his hat. Hugh pointed out to the man a modest hamper and some rugs.

"When you have found a perfect place, William, come back and fetch these," he said. Then, turning to me, he drew off the goggles and I saw his dear eyes were eager and anxious, and that his habitual look of perfect assurance and whimsical calm had left his face.

"No one could possibly know you in that veil," he told me, "and William will find us a secluded spot; he has been

my London head groom since I left Eton, and is as discreet as the grave. Do not be the least disturbed."

Still I was silent, too nervous to speak, and it seemed an eternity before the old man came back with smiling face, announcing that he had discovered the very thing, and, preceding us, carrying the basket and wraps, he led us to a giant tree close to a secluded copse, with not a soul in sight, and then, without a word, left us.

"He will take the car a little way on, and wait in it until I call him," Hugh said. "And now, won't you let me undo that thunder-cloud you are enveloped in, that I may see if the sun is shining at all beneath it for me?"

I let him unwind the veil, and I suppose my face, when he did see it, showed some of the emotions which were coursing through me, for he exclaimed in pain:

"Darling! You have hated coming! What is it? Oh, you make me so unhappy. Tell me, Guinevere."

He arranged the rug and a cushion, and I sat down, and he threw himself beside me.

"I—I cannot say what it is," I faltered. "I ought to be so happy, but I am so foolish. The having to take all these precautions has fretted something—I cannot breathe—" and I put out my gray-gloved hands unconsciously, and he seized them in his and kissed them passionately.

"I must make you forget all that," he cried. "Do not let us spoil the divine hours to me by these foolish sensations. Darling, do you not believe that I will take care of you? If it ever need be, I will protect you with my life. There is not the slightest danger now; we had merely to be careful in London because I am so tiresomely well known; but here, under the green trees, we are as free as in the park at home. Guinevere, won't you look at me less coldly and like a wounded doe? Those great gray eyes of yours are full of shadows, and your sweet lips are set."

I could not resist such pleading, of course, with him so near me, and so tender, and so full of that nameless, compelling attraction which cannot be described in words. Every fear left me. I only felt a strange thrill of some new exquisite emotion, and I leaned back against the old tree and closed my eyes.

Hugh's hands were firmly clasped together and his head lowered and turned from me when I opened them again; and his voice was rather hoarse as he said:

"I am going to show you to-day that I have some control over myself. I will try not even to touch your hand.

It is so good to be with you—that must be enough."

Then he began to unpack the basket, and first got out the kettle and spirit-lamp, and together we arranged things and made the tea.

"We have sandwiches and fruit, and a bottle of wine for later on," he informed me gaily. "But our picnic has to begin with tea; it is past five o'clock."

It seemed so sweet to sit there together and "play house," as Bob and I used to in the woods long ago, when we were children; and Hugh was so tender and gentle, and made me feel at last perfectly safe and joyous. And when we had finished we sat leaning our backs against the tree, surveying the beautiful green world with the shadows becoming longer, and far away in the distance a herd of deer.

"I want you to tell me a number of things, Hugh," I told him; "what life means to you—and what you think I should try and make it mean to me. Because since I have been here these two days with Letitia I seem to realize that all my points of view are shut in and out of proportion. I should like you to teach me new aspects. Will you, friend?"

"When your voice is so soft, I lose my head and become intoxicated," he answered fondly. "But I will try," and he turned himself so that he could look straight into my eyes. I dare say he is not so very handsome, really, but for me he seems to have the most beautiful face in the world.

"You must first of all look at everything with justice and common-sense, and never be influenced by custom and convention in your judgment of a circumstance, because then you are not being true to yourself but are merely echoing some other person or person's view. Just now, for instance, when you were so nervous and jarred, it was only because all the conventional currents were weighing upon you, and not that you were doing a thing you need be uncomfortable about. You were accepting the seeming, not the reality."

"Yes, I know it. I will try to be different in future. Now tell me, what does life mean to you?"

"When I am with you, it feels like heaven—as if everything was complete"—and his voice grew deep again—"as if I were at rest—a sensation I have never felt when with any other woman, though I have thought I loved some of them well enough, for various reasons, for short whiles. But in all my years up to now I have been unconsciously looking for something—I had had, hundreds of times, the sensation that I was waiting in expectancy for some great

thing, and that when it came it would be the keystone of my arch. The consciousness of this has often made me restless with longing, for it seemed that my nameless want would never be satisfied."

He picked some blades of grass and plaited them absently, looking down, and then he went on again dreamily:

"I was hardly aware that the desire was for a mate—a mate for my soul, I mean—and then I met you, Guinevere, and I knew you were the thing I had dreamed of for all these years. If I could have you with me always, there is not a single pleasure or duty of my life that I would not accomplish better—you would give meaning to all my aims. In spite of these kind women, like your sister and her friends, who have always been so good to me, I have often been hideously lonely, darling; and that is why I have spent months by myself at Minton Dremont, and traveling in outlandish countries—one is less solitary alone at times than with companions who do not feel all one's moods."

"And you think I should, Hugh?" His words made me so happy. "I hope I should understand you always, even the sides of you I did not quite like in the beginning."

He turned again and looked at me, and a ghost of a cloud crossed his eyes.

"Yes—a woman, if she is wise, should try to grasp that everything which is strong has aspects which repel, and then she can face them, or shut her eyes to them, as she thinks best."

I thought of Letitia's words once upon this subject, and I was silent; and he came a little nearer, and his voice had pleading in it and a caress:

"Guinevere, do not think of all those things—ever again. As long as you love me, they can never reënter my life—they were my straws which I caught at; now I am on firm land."

"Oh, my dear!" I whispered to him. "It is only because I was silly and, as I said, shut in that I ever criticised you. For me love is such an immense and divine thing, I could never have felt any of it for any one—only you—but of course I know men must be different, or the world could not go on."

He took and kissed my hands again, as though he could not help himself.

"Once in India, I met an Old Brahmin who explained to me a theory that souls go on in a long series of rebirths, as half-incomplete creatures, never being satisfied, until at

last they meet the other part of themselves, and become a whole soul in bliss; and when this occurs, they find perfect happiness and it is their last life on this planet. And afterwards they float, a completed whole, into realms of divine peace."

"What a beautiful idea!" I sighed. "Let us pray that it is true."

"I know it is," he responded tenderly, "because we are certainly those two happy souls, and—listen to this vow, Guinevere—I will never break with you; if we ever part, it will be you who will throw me from you, not I who will leave you. For me there can never be another woman as my soul's mate on earth."

A shiver of cold ran through me, and I suddenly touched his strong hands in fear.

"Hugh! Oh, I hope to God I shall never have to do that!"

"How pale you have grown, sweetheart," he exclaimed in distress. "And I may not kiss life back into those white roses, your cheeks"— and then he stopped, suddenly, angry with himself for this outburst of his emotions.

I knew he had meant—as I mean always—never to let passion come near us to scorch the joy we may have with its splendid breath.

"I am going to bring you some books to-morrow," he went on quickly, in another tone. "I have not had them specially bound, as I would have wished, for you, so that they may attract no attention. There are some whimsical things, and some things of sentiment, and some philosophies; and I have marked the places I want you to notice most; and then sometimes, when I can manage to come over to Redwood, we can discuss them."

"I shall love that."

After this, he became gay and made me laugh; and we told each other light-hearted things, and arranged how we would play our little comedy before all his friends without my having any jarring backward thoughts.

"It makes it sporting and amusing, if you can look at it like that," he said, "and draws us closer together to know we have a secret shared only by Letitia, who always has a twinkle in her eye."

"Letitia is a dear," I rejoined. "She comes like a breath of sane common-sense, and calms all altruism and nonsense."

"They are a perfectly matched couple. You don't know Langthorpe as I do. He has realized as completely as she

has that they must each live their own lives, and they get on to perfection when they are together. There has never been the least scandal about either of them; they are gentlepeople both."

"Yes, no one ought to make scandals," I agreed.

Just then, in the distance, some people passed, and for an instant I was tempted to put on my veil; but Hugh placed his hand firmly on my wrist, and his voice was even a little stern.

"Guinevere," he said, "are you not going to trust me, child? When there is the slightest necessity for caution, I will tell you; I implore you not to start thus like a frightened deer."

And all I could say was:

"Forgive me, Hugh." It was such a comfort to find him so firm and strong.

"I am going to call William now," he said, "and we will go on to another place and take a little walk—if that would please you, darling—and have our little dinner on our return. It is nearly half-past six."

Oh! how unspeakably happy we were after that! Gay and sweet and friendly. Hugh never once let himself go to frighten me or make me remember I must also hold myself; and at last we threw stones into a pond like schoolboys and made them skip; and I was so proud to show him that, with all my hopelessly feminine ways which Humphrey so deplores, I am yet able to throw a stone like a boy, the one thing Bob used to be particular about, teaching me ever since I was six years old.

Then we joined William again, and found a new place for our dinner of *foie gras* sandwiches and lovely strawberries and nectarines and grapes; and we laughed over our bottle of champagne, whose cork refused at first to come out—and altogether were merry as children at a feast. Presently, when the sun set and the moon rose, there was still a crimson glow in the west of a cloudless greenish sky.

"It will take us half an hour to get back to Norfolk Street, darling," Hugh said. "Alas! we soon ought to start."

"I shall not go to the Opera. I could not—after this—or the ball either that Letitia is going on to; but you had better join her—don't you think so?" I remarked.

And he quite agreed. So at last we packed our basket and let William put it in the motor, and then sat for a few moments longer, looking out on the exquisite scene.

That anything so peaceful, so rural, and so stately could be so near that great, roaring city, seemed impossible.

Lights of evening opalescence were turning the vividness of day into dreamland, and all was peace and silence.

"I have never been so happy in all my life, Guinevere," Hugh whispered, his voice strangely moved. "Say you love me once more before we go."

And I said it, trembling and not daring to look at him; and then we got into the car and spoke no more until we reached Victoria again, when we whispered a soft good-night. And soon I arrived at my sister's house in a cab, as though I had come from a train.

And until midnight I sat at my bedroom window—it is above Letitia's boudoir and looks over the park, too—and my mind was filled with joy and peace such as I have never known.

CHAPTER XIII

THE early post this morning brought me a letter from Hugh—the first note even I have ever had that was not for any one to read but myself. He has the art of writing letters, and I lay in bed and read it over and over, and thrilled with delight. He told me again how happy he had been with me in Richmond Park, and how he loved me. A woman, I am sure, cannot hear this fact too often for her pleasure! And, finally, he suggested that, as it was certain to be a fine day, if it were possible for me to come to the top of the Serpentine, where the fountains are, he would meet me there at twelve, and we could then strike into the heart of the beautiful Kensington Gardens, where there would be no one but nurses and children, and where we could certainly find some isolated chairs, where we could sit and talk. We were lunching with him and a party, later, at the newly opened Ritz.

This plan seemed quite possible, and at twelve Letitia left me to take a cab at Marshall and Shelgrove's; and with renewed joy I saw Hugh walking slowly up and down by the lily basins when I arrived at my destination.

I had no idea of the great beauty of Kensington Gardens. When we got on to the fine turf and wandered among the old trees, it seemed an enchantment of peace and verdure, with no one to worry us but the friendly sheep. We found two chairs far away from any others, and there sat in contentment. A new phase had been reached between us; we turned glad eyes to each other often, but we did not speak much at first. I was delighted my gray muslin pleased Hugh, with the white roses stuck in my belt.

"I love your points, Guinevere," he said. "You are as fine as a thoroughbred horse—so slender and graceful, with your little wrists and ankles, and that long, rounded

throat; there is something fresh and virginal about you. No one would ever take you for a married woman—you are nothing but a slip of a girl. My baby girl!"

"But I am thirty-one now, Hugh," I told him, letting the possessive case he had used pass, with a thrill. "It is ridiculous of you! My birthday was on the fourth of June."

But he only smiled fondly, while he went on detailing the things I possess which charm him. I never knew before I had attractions like this, and I felt I was almost purring with satisfaction, as Petrov does when I recount to him the glories of his velvet fur.

"Your little neat head, like a maiden Diana," Hugh whispered, "and those wise gray eyes! I love to watch all the moods that mirror in them; that look of rebellion and smouldering, suppressed pain is leaving them now, darling, I am glad to say."

"I am so happy, Hugh!"

"And so am I!"

Then we laughed at nothing at all. Heavens! how altogether childish people become when they are in love! Perhaps it is because they are taken up so near to heaven, and there things are simple and sweet.

"It will be such fun at lunch. I have had the extraordinary self-sacrifice to put that known *coureur des dames,* Freddy Burgoyne, beside you, because I have noticed that he has already shown signs of weariness when with the lady to whom at the moment he is playing the rôle of *cavalier servante;* and so the whole set will vibrate with interest to see if he turns to you, and all possible scent regarding you and me will be warded off. A French fellow once wrote some very sensible advice upon this matter, which, however, I believe he added, human beings were very seldom able to take. I think the sentence ran: 'A pair of lovers may enjoy one another in peace if both are able to play the comedy of interests elsewhere.'"

"And he thought that would be difficult?" I asked, putting back my mauve parasol.

"Of course," laughed Hugh. "The innate jealousy in man would make it almost impossible for him to bear seeing his lady apparently interested in another; and a woman also would not like it."

"N-o, I suppose not," I admitted.

"That is why I said I had been extraordinarily self-sacrificing in intending to put Freddy at your side at

luncheon. We ought to try if we can follow the Frenchman's advice."

"Then you, too, will have to simulate interest in some one?" I inquired, and I was conscious of an unpleasant twinge. The Frenchman evidently knew human nature!

"Yes, I am going to look at an American lady!"

"The one Letitia let them think you saw at Mitley?" I blurted out, before I thought what I was saying; and he turned and glanced at me questioningly and almost hardly.

"They have been discussing me again, have they?" he demanded, and he frowned.

"You are a tremendous interest to every one, you know."

"They are scorpions, most of them." And then he laughed. "But, after all, they are awfully good to me, and it is only since I have known you, Guinevere, that I ever felt disgusted with them."

"I do not wish that you should do that. I would hate to think I had ever come between you and your friends."

His face had grown as cynical as when I first knew him: it hurt me. He tilted his chair back and laughed shortly; then he looked at me and, I suppose, saw that I was troubled, for he put out his hand and touched mine gently, while his dark-blue eyes melted in tenderness.

"Let us forget all about them, darling, and all these hateful things of the world. When you and I are together, let us keep to ourselves, and our own interests. Yours are enough for me, and I want to make mine enough for you."

"Indeed they are, Hugh. And I dislike small things. I want to hear all about when you were a boy, and what you did at Oxford, and why you have never gone into Parliament—and oh! everything that concerns you."

Joy filled his glance again, and he told me numbers of dear old reminiscences, and then he said:

"I never went into Parliament because it seems to me no longer the place for a gentleman. I have not the temperament which could ever let me trim my coat or alter my opinions at a chief's bidding, and I have not brains enough, I dare say, to be independent and a leader myself. All we landowners can do now is to play the game in the country and try to keep up the prestige of our order, and do our duty by the people and those dependent upon us."

"Well, it is a fine aim. I am glad you are not mixed up in hateful politics," I responded. "It must be good enough to stand on your marble terrace and look out at the beautiful park at Minton Dremont, and know it is all yours, and

has been your family's for so many hundreds of years."

His eyes clouded again for a second and grew a little sad.

"Yes, but they are such rotters who will come after me—my cousin's boys, you know. The thought of them hits me in the face sometimes, and used almost to drive me into marrying."

A strange feeling came over me: I could not analyze it, it had in it pain and joy and—unrest.

But the quiet sheep browsed near us, and the warm air of the June morning seemed to tell me to banish all disturbing thoughts and live only in the present.

"I hope Algernon will acquire some of this feeling, Hugh," I said. "At present, Redwood means nothing to him except a hunting centre; he has no possessive pride in it as his home; and he dislikes the house, I believe."

"It is a most wonderful old place, but it is gloomy," Hugh admitted; "and then he was not accustomed to it from his birth—that makes all the difference. The General loves it, doesn't he?"

"Yes, in a way; but lately he has grumbled at everything there. I believe myself it is saturated and haunted with the horrors of the past, and no one who lived there would ever find content. But I will not say this again, Hugh. Don't let us talk of Redwood. I want to forget everything for the time but that we are here and—free."

"You must go back on Saturday?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, indeed. It was the greatest piece of good fortune obtaining this much leave. It is the first time since I have been married that I have been allowed to visit Letitia in London."

"Then I must see you all the time, darling; every moment is precious. After lunch to-day I propose we go down to Hurlingham—there is a polo match or something, and we could contrive to get away by the river. It is such a second-class crowd there, we might not observed; and in any case I will divert the ideas of our intimates at lunch, so that if they did chance upon us they will not think anything but that I am being polite to Letitia's sister." And this made him laugh. "Polite to Letitia's sister! When I should like to shout from the house-tops, 'I adore this darling lady, I worship her as a queen, I would be proud to possess her for my own before the whole world!' Oh, the irony of it all!"

"Hugh!" I gasped—he had moved me so.

Then he went on more gently, making the most exquisite

love to me, until I neither knew nor cared for time or place—or fate. All the earth and trees and sky, even the very sheep, seemed to be fused in the glamour of the summer morning, and the voice of my beloved.

And at last a sense of intoxication stole over us both, and it seem as if we must fall into each other's arms. I have never allowed myself to imagine what it would be like if Hugh should really kiss me, but the vivid thought would come to me there in the green shade, and so I jumped up hurriedly and asked him that we should walk. I must banish such feelings, I knew. He knew it, too, and made no objection, and, moving along, we grew more masters of ourselves.

Then, finally, he put me into a cab at a Bayswater exit, to return to Norfolk Street, and then went back into the Gardens himself to walk rapidly to the drive going to Prince's Gate, where he said his motor would be waiting. And when we met in the hall of the Ritz for luncheon he greeted me coolly, as though we had not seen each other since the day before at Lady Latrobe's.

"It was perfectly splendid your not coming to the Opera last night, Guinevere," Letitia told me as we drove along. "Hugh's arriving alone like that, and then talking to first Beatrice Trehearn and then Winnie, on the opposite side of the house, has let them all sleep in peace!"

Letitia's late attraction—and the Duchess's, too, I understood!—Mr. Burgoyne, was a most agreeable person and appeared glad to devote himself to me, the lady he is at present amusing not being of the party; and I left pleased that I seemed to be more successfully playing my part than Hugh was his, for I could see he was bored with his lovely American, whose name I did not hear, although she was most beautiful and brilliant. But his dear eyes wandered now and then in my direction, and once he caught my eye and raised his brow with a whimsical question in it, as much as to say, "Aren't you overdoing it, Guinevere?"

And now I am resting before dressing for the ball; and our afternoon at Hurlingham, where we were only able to get off alone for a very short time, has given me something to think about.

Hugh was restless, not as he was in the morning or at our divine picnic dinner last night. The pupils of his dear blue eyes were dilated, and he seemed not to be able to keep to any subject for long. He reproached me, too, about Freddy Burgoyne, and I am not sure it was all in play.

But he is coming to dine here before the ball to-night, and perhaps during the evening we may have some chance of speech. I feel rather reckless. It is all a wild fret.

. . . . . .

How things go on! A fiery spirit of love cannot be kept at one level, it seems. I ought to have known this, of course. Well, I know it now, but I am going to continue to throw dust in my own eyes. I *will not* look ahead. I am living at last, breathing every moment of the vital days, and a quivering excitement possesses me.

Hugh and I were not near each other at dinner, and when he came up to me rather too eagerly afterward in the ball-room, which had been built over the space to the railings in Park Lane, Letitia joined us immediately.

"Hugh," I heard her whisper to him, "for Heaven's sake, do not be a fool! It has all gone so splendidly up to this—don't spoil it, or I won't help you any more." And she laughed and took him off with her. But she made it up to us at the end of the evening by going in to a second supper with him herself, and then coming over to me, who happened to be sitting with her admirer, Lord Albert Mansfield, and we four supped for a long time, having rather changed partners. Then she whispered, when we got out into the hall:

"Come up into my sitting-room, Guinevere; most of those who matter have gone, and we won't be missed for a few minutes. I am dead tired, and I want a cigarette."

And when we were there she went on into her bedroom, and as she shut that door Hugh opened the one we had entered by and came toward me, his eyes blazing and his hands outstretched.

"Darling!" he gasped passionately—but I shrank away in fear. The obviousness of the way we had been left alone again oppressed me. It jarred upon me to a point that I was cold.

Pain came into his face, and he dropped his hands. Then my heart melted immediately, and a wild excitement leapt up.

"Forgive me," he pleaded, "but the strain of the day has driven me mad. Guinevere, don't you love me any more, that you shrink away like this?"

I leaned against the mantelpiece and I clasped my hands tight.

"Yes," I gasped, "I love you too much. Hugh, I asked you to take care of me in the beginning, when you made me tell you first. We are rushing along in a torrent now. Oh!

let us try to help each other to keep from the weir as long as we can!" I was trembling so I could not go on.

He came close and stood beside me, and he was very pale.

"It is all absolutely impossible," he said hoarsely. "I am a man, and you are a woman—we are not saints in story-books or blocks or wood. I must—I will—hold you in my arms."

But I moved away quickly, and, half crazy with my passionate emotions, I sat down at the piano. My hands were bare, I had not put on my gloves again after supper! and I began that tune which had moved him so much in the drawing-room at home.

I played it as I have never done before; it seemed as if my very soul were wailing in farewell.

He came over and leaned on the piano, and as I watched him all the hot passion died out of his eyes, and in its place there grew two great glittering tears, which filled them and, brimming over, splashed down upon my fingers.

Then, without a word, he turned and left the room, closing the door softly after him.

And when Letitia came back in a few minutes she found me sitting alone, as cold as death.

"Guinevere," she said, alarmed; and she shook me. "Pull yourself together, dear, and use your common sense. These tragic looks are *bourgeois* and theatrical."

And, as usual, her influence over me was calming and reassuring. I felt I had been a fool, and that I ought to have been different; and that there was no reason for so much pain.

She left me in a few seconds and went down to find Hugh; but when I had calmed myself enough to go back to the ballroom she met me with the news that he had left the house—and I had no one but myself to blame.

Oh! trees in the misty park, all cold and gray at dawn, what is your message? Is there an ache greater than unfulfilment?

. . . . . .

A note came for Letitia from Hugh while we breakfasted very late in her sitting-room this morning, its daylight air so gay and so different from the night before. She read the note over twice very attentively; she had chatted with me during the meal about every irrelevant thing and never mentioned either Hugh or the scene she had guessed had taken place. Finally, she looked up at me critically, and said in her level voice:

"Guinevere, you made Hugh very unhappy last night with your tiresome seriousness. He is still awfully upset and cannot make up his mind what to do. Do you want him to go away and not see you again for ages? Or are you going to be sensible and behave like a human being, without this dramatic nonsense, and let him lunch with us here quietly, and then all dine at Ada's to-night, and dance at her ball? You quite discourage me in helping you to enjoy life."

"Of course I wish to see him again," I faltered. The situation seemed so different in the morning light. "I expect I am very foolish. What time shall we lunch?"

"Not until two. I shall tell Hugh to come round at half-past one; then you can settle your differences. Langthorpe is the only other man, so we shall be four."

My brother-in-law returned yesterday in time for Letitia's ball.

She got up and went to the telephone, which is fixed in this room.

She rang up a number, and after some little delay evidently spoke to Hugh himself.

"Come to lunch, Hugh, at half-past one—that is my answer." Then, "Guinevere has eaten an excellent breakfast. Being in the country so long has made her rather *bourgeois* —I have scolded her well. No, of course not!"—and she glanced at me with a roguish smile— "I am not the least unkind to her. Hugh! don't be so indiscreet. Yes, you may send her some roses—white ones? They had better be addressed to me. Her maid is a country frump, too. These modest, retiring, innocent people are terribly difficult to deal with! You like them like that? Oh, well, you are welcome to them, then! Good-bye, dear boy!" And, showing all her strong white teeth in a frank, kindly smile, Letitia put down the receiver.

I felt at ease and at peace again, all the storm of the dawn calmed. How sensible my sister is! How I wish I had a temperament like hers!

When Hugh came I was sitting in the library downstairs on the ground floor. It is a cool, heliotrope-tinted place, with big comfortable chairs, and it was filled with pink roses. The splendid white bunch which had arrived for me stood alone on a table by me.

I got up nervously, but as the servants held the door Hugh came forward gaily, with a chaffing greeting, and we sat down on the sofa together.

"Hugh, I am sorry," I said shyly. "Letitia says I am a fool—and I dare say I am."

"No, you are not a fool," he returned eagerly and fondly. "You are just the purest, truest darling; and I was a brute. But I was quite mad last night—the whole thing was so tantalizing. You looked so sweet, and I love you so passionately. You will make allowances for me, won't you, Guinevere?"

"Of course I will," I returned, while I seemed to take in his wonderful charm afresh. He is so distinguished-looking, and so long and thin and strong.

"And now, to-day, I am going to try and amuse you. But first you must play to me—some beautiful things which will banish the memory of that farewell."

I went to a small piano there is up in a corner, and for a quarter of an hour I let my fingers wander over the notes in all sorts of gentle, soothing things, and, as before at Redwood, Hugh sat quite still. Then I got up and joined him on the sofa again.

"There!" I said. "Now all clouds are over, and we are going to be lovely friends." And I held out my hand.

He took it and did not let it go again, and at once my heart, which I thought was quiet and orderly, began to beat wildly, and I had a mad desire to slip forward into his arms.

It was he who got up this time and moved away, and he spoke at once, rather fast, of the flowers—if I liked the white roses, and had I got them without any difficulty? I knew they were for me, he supposed. He continued in this strain until at about five minutes to two Langthorpe joined us. He is a bluff, good-natured creature, whom everybody likes. He and Hugh are intimate friends. They made everything easy, and, not waiting for Letitia, who is often late, we went in to luncheon.

When she did come she brought Lord Albert with her, and we discussed the ball with the greatest merriment. Ada Marjoribanks' to-night could not possibly be so good, they all agreed.

Afterwards, Langthorpe drove us all down on his coach to a garden-party a little way out of town at a famous ducal house. I sat beside him on the box-seat and then, when we arrived, in a walk of clipped yews that reminded us a little of Minton Dremont, Hugh paced beside me for a while.

"To-night will be the same sort of torment as last night was, and this afternoon is," he said. "But to-morrow we can be happy on the river alone. The Northeys are charm-

ing people. The girl and her *fiancé* only want to be together, and Letitia will account for young Gerald Northey, so you and I can have an afternoon of unalloyed peace, Guinevere, and the evening after dinner, too—I have arranged that we dine at the house of a friend of mine there who is away. He has a nice little place, with a lawn going going down to the river, and two or three good punts."

"It sounds enchanting," I cried.

To-day we both seemed playing a part; the fond intimacy and friendliness appeared to have fled. Hugh talked as though he were trying to amuse me and leave a good impression, and I, too, was hardly natural once; and all the time the excitement kept growing and growing in my veins, until, when we climbed on to the coach again to go back, Langthorpe said merrily:

"By Jove, Guinevere, you are getting better-looking every day! I never saw such bright eyes, my dear."

When we got in there was a letter from Humphrey. Algernon and he had been constructing a mild steeple-chase course in the park; this sounded as if things were mended between them again. Fortunately, my son shows no signs of deep or lasting feelings, and when his outbursts of passion are over he goes on whatever way pleases him, without a backward thought. I had left him on the Monday in the highest spirits again, with the promise of a thoroughbred hunter for the Christmas holidays, which Humphrey had intended buying for himself but which he thought not up to his weight.

My husband's letter was curt as usual, and ended with this characteristic sentence:

"The brougham and the luggage-cart will meet the 4:22 train on Saturday. Mind you do not miss it, as no other will be met."

So I have only to-morrow to enjoy life in before I cross the drawbridge of Redwood Moat.

CHAPTER XIV

How difficult it is to write sometimes! But yet I want to ɔut down—to comfort myself—all my joys—and pains.

Ada Marjoribanks' ball was a great success, every one ;aid. Before we started, I schooled myself to remember the Frenchman's maxim, and the moment I got speech with Hugh [whispered it to him, to remind him again.

"Let us trust each other, Hugh," I said, "as we are going :o be happy to-morrow; and do not let us be together at all :o-night."

And he agreed, but not very heartily, and although I knew we were both playing a game, I felt disturbed and *distraite* :he whole time, and I believe he did also, for he came down :o the door with us when we said good night, and managed :o whisper:

"It is perfect hell, this sort of thing, Guinevere. It might ɔe possible if I were married to you and knew I should have you in peace with me in an hour's time; but to go off alone, ıungry, like a starving wretch—jealous and unsatisfied—it is more than I can bear. If you were going to stay on I would not come out again."

"I hate it, too—but there is to-morrow," I said shyly, and got into the electric brougham after Letitia very quickly, and we called a good night. But it was broad daylight, and the comfort was to know that in a few hours we should meet again.

The weather this whole week has been too glorious: hot and perfectly delicious, and when we were all ready to start for Maidenhead at two o'clock at Norfolk Street, it seemed as if the hottest day of the year had come.

Hugh had been very merry at luncheon, and the Northey party seemed exactly the people for us.

"They do not know one of our friends," Letitia told me,

"and can't even if they wished to do so, spread interesting news."

It had been arranged that the *fiancés* sat in the back seat of Hugh's car and I beside him, while Letitia took Mr. Northey alone in hers.

We did not talk very much on the way down—just stupid little glad things with underneath meanings for ourselves; and we had the luck not to have a puncture, and got there on time. Letitia was not so fortunate, and did not arrive until an hour after us; but by then we were out in our punts, and did not see her until we returned for dinner.

"I had some fresh cushions sent down for you, my sweet lady," Hugh said, as he arranged me, "because I know you do not like red, and all old Jack's boats are done with red. These soft blue ones suit you much better, and I can look down and drink in the whole picture you make."

I had never been in a punt before. It seems a very lazy, reclining sort of thing, and gives a peculiar drowsy, delicious feeling as one goes along with the soft swish through the water. I felt so happy, every disturbing thought had left me; I was at peace and meant to enjoy my last day.

Hugh took us along so skilfully, and seemed to know exactly where we should eventually find a delightful and secluded backwater, where he shot in under some willows in a bower of green. Then he fastened our skiff securely and came over the middle seat to me, and asked if he might come and sit at my side.

"I am going to read to you, Guinevere," he said.

I gave him leave, of course. Some spell was over me—those feelings of alarm and unrest had fled.

And he soon was settled among the blue cushions.

We were no nearer, I suppose, than we had been when we sat with our backs to the tree in Richmond Park—or even on the sofa in the library at Norfolk Street—but it seemed as if we were, with the sides of the punt, and the water beyond; and over me there now stole a wild excitement again, so that I felt a pulse in my ears.

Hugh drew out a book from under the cushion at his side. It was Rossetti's Sonnets, which we both knew by heart. He turned over the pages quickly, but did not begin to read at once.

"Is not this absolutely divine!" he whispered blissfully.

"Absolutely," I said.

"Are you happy, darling?" then he demanded the eternal question, the answer to which gives those who love so much

joy. And when I murmured that I was, he gave a great sigh of content, and found a sonnet and began to read. I was so trembling with new sensations that now I cannot remember which one it was; the actual words conveyed no meaning to me, only the sense of—love. He stopped when he had finished the last line, and we were absolutely silent; only, I thought he must hear the beating of my heart.

"Darling!" he whispered, and, turning, sat more uprightly, looking at me. "Guinevere, darling—*I cannot bear it!* I love you so!" And he slipped his arm round me and drew me close as he kissed my lips.

Oh! what immense joy and emotion! Nothing I can ever have in the rest of my life can cause the supreme, indescribable thrill of that first kiss! The starving, the denying of ourselves that we have been through all these days! The whole force of nature at boiling-point for expression! And now, at last, in that delicious cool green shade, with the drowse of happy insects and the sweet noises of June summer around us—to be satisfied! Ah! . . . There was nothing brutal or wildly passionate in Hugh's kiss, but it made me almost faint with delight.

I did not resist him. I could not, of course; it seemed perfectly natural and of the day, that he should encircle me with his arm and that we should recline thus in the punt, with my head on his shoulder. I had taken off my hat when he first tied us to the bank.

"You are not angry with me, darling, are you?" he pleaded, as he kissed me again—the gentlest caress. "You would not be human if you did not understand. We were such fools to imagine we could live on words and looks and sympathy. I knew always it must come to this. But we have fought as well as we could, and now we will rest a while together in this sweet way."

He put my parasol so that no one coming by chance from beyond could possibly see us, and there we spent an afternoon of such happiness that I know now what heaven means.

All that I have ever seen of a man's love before was a brutal, horrible thing of terror and disgust. But to rest here in the punt, and be caressed and whispered to, my eyes and lips and hair kissed gently by my darling one, thrilled every fibre of my being.

"To-day you are my little sweetheart," Hugh said. "I am not going to frighten my tender love in the least—she shall know what peace means, here in my arms. This is enough for us—is it not, darling child?"

And all I could murmur was a yes of content.

Now, looking back, with the grim stone walls of my turret chamber closed in around me, I can try to analyze how it was no sense came to me of the fear and resistance to something I longed for and dared not grasp, which had assailed me each time we had been before on the brink of an embrace. All I can know clearly is that nature is stronger than any other thing, when propinquity sets the currents in motion. I believe, if Humphrey, with a drawn sword ready to kill me, had been standing not far off, at that moment when Hugh first held me close to his heart, I could not have resisted his fond kiss, or lessened for an instant the joy it caused me. Why do we spend our lives fighting against nature, I wonder? I have never felt this sensation in the slightest degree for any other man, and I suppose I never shall in my life. Humphrey says always no other woman in the world could be so utterly cold and sexless, and that I am not capable of feeling or arousing the least passion; and a man who might glance at me as he had done, attracted by my looks, would be frozen into instantaneous indifference by my icy unresponsiveness, just as he had been.

Perhaps, as Letitia once said, there are rare human beings, like eagles, who only desire one mate. Well, if Hugh and I never meet in the future and are never really lovers in this world, I shall always continue to adore him, and him alone.

We talked in little sentences of love and its meaning, and the unspeakable solace it was not to have to expand all our forces in resisting something, as dangerous subjects which we feared would illumine emotion in us. Instead of which, we spent the hours, until it was time to return for dinner, in a complete fusion of sympathy and relaxation, Hugh whispering to me whatever love-message came into his head, and I murmuring fond answers in return.

He played with my hands, measuring them against his strong, fine fingers, and held them up to see their transparency; and then his dear voice grew anxious.

"You look so awfully delicate, Guinevere," he said. "These little hands are mere white flowers. I want to take care of you all the time. You require constant loving tenderness and devotion. If I had you always with me at Minton Dremont, I would pet and protect you so that you would grow quite strong and rosy."

"I am really not delicate, Hugh," I said. "I mean, I have a splendid constitution, only I live so much into myself and feel everything so awfully deeply, with no outlet, that I sup-

pose I use up all my vitality. It will be different now—" and then I felt shy, and buried my face in his white flannel coat.

"Yes, everything will be different now," he said, moved to kiss me again.

"We must try not to be greedy, Hugh," I told him. "It will be terribly difficult not to meet often, but we must try always to keep happy at this level."

"Ye-es," he answered. "Of course——"

"You do not think we shall be able to?" I asked, disturbed a little. But he only smoothed my hair, while he answered tenderly:

"We won't make any plans, my darling child. I told you in the very beginning, when the imperative necessity comes for more fulfilment, we must leave it to—fate."

I cannot, of course, confide in any one, even Letitia, as to my emotions, but I do wonder if other women, when they love a man absolutely, as I love Hugh, feel as I do. There are things he says, tones in his voice, which suddenly make me thrill in senses and brain and soul to such an extent that I feel almost intoxicated. "My virginal Maiden of the Snows," he once called me—but I am sure I am not that, if he only knew.

"Hugh, does it please you," I whispered to him, as he stroked my eyelids and brow with a willow leaf he had picked—"does it please you that no one else has ever made me feel at all—in any way?" Tell me, Hugh."

"Does it please me!" And the most ecstatic satisfaction came into his eyes. "Would the rarest diamond please one who loved jewels and had only possessed imitations all his life hitherto?"

"You will not grow tired of me because I am like that—only able to love you and no other?" I asked again.

"Oh, my dear," he said, gravely, "the cynics say—and I was one of them until I met you—that nothing one possesses continues to please one, and that all things and emotions are transient and have their day. But now I know that when love is as yours and mine, springing instantly into being, with every taste and idea and sympathy in unison, that it is of God, and makes a whole which not even death can part. Guinevere, if I ever thought your love for me could be capable of fluctuations—if you could ever stoop to subterfuge or to tease me with another, then the fabric of that perfect reverence I have for you would fade and pass away."

"You need not fear, Hugh,," I answered him. "I cannot

pretend. I am your own, with no secrets for the rest of eternity."

"Heart of me!" was all he said, and his eyes looked into mine with reverent joy.

I dare say we appeared very happy when we joined the others for dinner, because Letitia had the expression of a pleased mother-cat when she glanced at us, and was as gay and amusing as it is possible to be. And after it, when the moon rose, we got into the punts again and swirled away to the willow bower once more.

It was all mystery now, with glancing lights and shadows and fairies floating on the beams of the Lady of Night; and a new intoxication was in our veins and we hardly talked, and now and then I shivered, although the air was intensely hot and still.

There was the sensation that Hugh was restraining himself in his gentle caresses and love murmurings; there was a quivering mighty force suggested, although, if anything, he was gentler and less passionate than in the afternoon.

At last I just stayed quiet, too overcome to struggle with my new emotions or wonder more, while he poured upon me all the tender adorations that words could express rushing from his heart. Every sentence is treasured, but it is all too sacred to write about. It was one of the evenings when mortals taste heaven and are the equals of the gods.

At last, when we heard eleven o'clock chime from some church tower, I started forward. It seemed as if the deep strokes were a reminder of reality, a cruel sentinel bidding us remember that joy was only a dream, and earth was there waiting for us.

"Oh, my sweet!" cried Hugh, "do not go yet. Oh! God, I cannot bear it! Guinevere—I tell you—soon the imperative necessity must come, and when it does, promise me, if fate gives you to me, you will not shut the door."

"Hugh," I whispered—but my lips were dry— "I love you, and things must always be—as you wish."

Then he clasped me to his heart once more, in a fond farewell embrace, and we silently went back through the moonlit water to the boathouse, and there joined the other four on the veranda.

Hugh's face was pale and stern, and his eyes looked black as night. And what we all said—chaffing at supper—I have not the least idea. Only my memory clings to the drive back to London—alone with him in his car this time—the

hedges bathed in the moonbeams and the silent country flying past us through the summer night.

"My darling sweetheart!" he whispered just before we arrived at Norfolk Street. "You have made me so divinely happy, I have no worship great enough to give you. Remember always that my love goes with you to Redwood and surrounds you all the time, and so let the frets of things pass, and look out at the east window. It will be some time before you see my flag flying, but when you do, you will know that somehow I will come to you, and we shall be happy once more."

Then we wrung hands and parted on the doorstep, and I stumbled up to my room overlooking the park, too overcome with joy and glory even to be able to bear Letitia's friendly good night.

And this morning early, before I started for Redwood, among the parcel of books Hugh sent me there was a single volume, beautifully bound, of Rossetti's Sonnets, and against one of them lay a folded paper; and when I opened it, all I saw written were these words: "Remember, that day will come."

But which sonnet they touched must always remain buried in my heart.

CHAPTER XV

HUMPHREY was standing before the chimney-piece, awaiting me, in the library downstairs when I returned home a week ago, and a thunder-cloud hung on his brow.

Nothing had gone right during my absence, it would seem. The new first footman, who had just come to take the place of one of the two dismissed during the fit of gout, had broken a valuable china god, who had been accustomed to live on the smoking-room bookcase, and he, too, was now under notice to leave.

"A woman has no business to be gadding up to London," my husband announced, "and letting her own home go hang. Her duty is there first. You had no right to be visiting."

It would have been of no use my saying all had been quiet and orderly when I left, or that he himself had allowed me to accept my sister's invitation. It was better for me to permit the blame of the breakage of the china god to rest quietly upon my shoulders than to have any row. Humphrey, who is the wittiest *raconteur* of stories possible, has absolutely no sense of humor about anything which concerns himself.

By a sense of humor I mean that instantaneous appreciation of a situation, that power of detachment from being one of the actors in it, even if physically one is, so that one can view its aspects and see the comic side, though it should be to one's own detriment. Humphrey and Algernon are only able to grasp obvious jokes, and laugh at funny stories, which is quite a different thing.

Hugh once said, in one of our talks, that a sense of humor was a product of the highest civilization, and could not flourish in any country until it went hand in hand with scepticism. The Greeks had it, Lucian and the later writers especially, and some of the Romans; then it lapsed into darkness, and

did not really emerge brightly until the eighteenth century. This seems true. Sentiment, on the other hand, could be in perfect unison with beliefs. There can be nothing more full of sentiment than the "Morte d'Arthur," compiled at a time when only among the most highly-educated had doubts begun to spring, and it certainly dated originally from much further back. For my part, I have always believed in Arthur and his knights, and every word of that book. For me they will ever remain true heroes of history, and not fabulous creatures in any way, and I am sure Hugh's spirit descended from one of them, and Humphrey's, too. They both have their prototypes therein. But I am not like Guinevere—I love my Lancelot without question or paltry jealousies of imaginary Elaines or others, and I am no great queen, only a very loving woman.

Letitia wrote to me this morning. Her friends are getting quite worried, she says, at "Winnie's" inability to secure Hugh! They almost regret Mrs. Dalison! They are so afraid he may look outside the circle. They have not the faintest suspicion about me, she is glad to say, and she herself is taking a Puck-like joy in the situation. Hugh had gone off down to the Isle of Wight, where he is having a new racing schooner tested to be ready for Cowes week, she said, and she—Letitia—is beginning to wonder if her interest in Lord Albert will last out the season!

I smiled when I read this epistle, and then carefully got out of bed and burned it with a match in the open grate. Humphrey has never respected my correspondence, and would read any letter of mine he fancied might interest him; but fortunately he does not see the early post, and never, except that once when he helped to show the Minton Dremont party "The Lady Margaret's Chamber," has he come into my room.

What could be the tragedy for a woman who loves a man as I love Hugh, were she forced to live with her husband as his wife! But for me that would be a completely impossible situation. If I were really any longer married to Humphrey, I could not have admitted Hugh even to a close friendship. I once read a French novel called *Partage*. It made an extraordinary effect upon me. But, mercifully, I am free—free since almost ten years—from any personal bondage. I should be very grateful for that. And I am.

I feel happy all the day long. I never look ahead. I laugh with Algernon, and play tennis with him and his tutor, and I try to fall in with every wish of Humphrey's; and he

said only to-day, at luncheon, that my visit to London had, after all, done me good—I was looking quite alive. I ride with them both after tea, and Algernon is trying to teach me to jump a tiny hurdle in his steeplechase course.

But I look out, night and morning, from the east window of my shrine, and I send a prayer across the trees for the happiness and welfare of the owner of the red chimneys which I see.

After a colossal joy such as I have had, one seems to be satisfied for a while and wants nothing more; but then begins at last an ache again. I felt it this morning, and it has been growing all day. The beauty of the scenery touches some chord of longing for Hugh. Roses make me quiver; evening opalescence, sounds of birds—everything of sweetness and Nature seems to speak to me of my dear. I shall have to begin a stiff course of reading again.

We are going to remain here all the time, with no change. And the neighbors, now that the fine weather and lack of hunting interests leave them freer, come to see us more often.

Petrov is a great comfort to me. I squeeze him and caress him, and tell all kinds of tales into his short pointed ears. He follows me about all the time like a dog, if he can, and I have difficulties to keep him in safety in the turret room.

How am I going to get through the days, now that this ache has begun? I do not know.

. . . . . .

Weeks and weeks have gone by. It is the end of September now, and raining hard. Letitia has come down to stay with us, among others, for our first partridge shoot. I am writing alone in my turret room, late at night. I sit here in this quiet hour and read the books Hugh sent me in London. They bring me a certain comfort, but, never having seen him once since June, I seem to have slipped back into rather a gray hopelessness again. Letitia has often sent me news of him. He went yachting, and then to Scotland; and Humphrey heard that he had been down to Minton Dremont for two separate days on business; but his flag did not fly, and we saw no sight of him. For five years, it appears, he has not been absent from his home for so long. I feel that I know why. It is not because he has forgotten me. Now and then, a new book comes from a shop, as if I had ordered it myself, and I find, when I read it, it contains some message, so I have tried to comfort myself; and

surely he must come back, now that the shooting season has begun.

Letitia has finished with Lord Albert, and was so amusing about him just now when she sat in here with me before going to bed.

"Albert was all very well, Guinevere," she said. "He carried me through the season admirably. He danced nicely, and understood music, and knew everything I wanted in London. But for the autumn I find I require one with more outdoor tastes. Albert was a shocking golf-player, and although I don't care for golf, one must play nowadays, and there is no use in having a person about one who is incapable of being a help."

"Did he mind getting his *Congé?*" I asked. "Poor Lord Albert!"

"Of course he did, a little; but he is staying up with Ada now, in the north, and she is sure to place him again before the winter. And, meanwhile, I have no one. I must say, Guinevere, seeing Hugh's devotion to you rather sickened me with what we all have to put up with."

"But you knew Hugh, all of you, for years before I ever saw him. Why did none of you secure him? You had every chance."

"Yes—" and she shaded her eyes from the fire with her hand; "we had too much chance; and somehow we do not ever seem to arouse passions like that. There are cases where the thing seems profound, and lasts more or less, like Hilda Flint and Charlie Vernaby; but he is awfully unfaithful now and then to her, and only remains from habit and because she knows all about his horses."

To be able to keep a lover only because one knew about his horses! Oh! how unspeakably humiliating!

"You see," Letitia went on meditatively, "we rush about too much, and see each other too often to make any man in our set feel he wants any of us exclusively. He knows we should tire, even if he did not, and the whole thing is give and take, and momentary propinquity, and how things fall out. I have always thought it was far the best way—only, your two faces that night at Maidenhead, and a talk Hugh had with me afterward, made me feel a little wistful. Perhaps it might be divine to be loved as Hugh loves you."

I knew it was; but I only looked into the fire.

"And yet it would not be possible in the world," my sister went on, as though to comfort herself. "It would make a scandal. Of course, it is the kind of thing that only happens

once in a century. I almost believe you would be quite happy if you were even married to each other."

"I hope we should," I said.

"By the way, what will you do, Guinevere, when Hugh does marry, some day? He will have to, you know, with those awful consumptive prospective heirs as an alternative."

I suddenly grew deadly cold, and Letitia kept her steady eyes on my face all the time, and must have seen me get paler, for she said, in a different voice:

"You care for him awfully, Guinevere. Oh! dear, that is pain, after all. Perhaps it was not worth it."

I came and sat on a low stool by her side and put my head against her knee.

"Yes, it was, Letitia—worth anything: heaven or hell. But we are not lovers—in the sense that you sometimes use the word—and must try never to be."

Letitia bent forward and took my chin in her hands, and looked long into my eyes; and, as once before in this very room, a mist grew in hers.

"Your little face is like a child's, darling," she said. "So pure and true. To you, for Hugh really to be your lover would mean something divinely terrible, would it not? Well, I am afraid now that he will be, of course; it is only a question of time. You cannot stem a torrent with a rose-hedge, or even with a stone wall. I feel horribly responsible, because I only meant to amuse you in the beginning; but it will be then I shall have to take care of you, or your romantic and serious notions will destroy yourself." Then she bent and kissed me. "Guinevere promise me you will make no further moves without letting me know. There must be some one with common-sense to watch over you. Hugh has stayed away because he's fighting against temptation as hard as he can; but it is bound to conquer in the end, directly you see each other again."

"Then perhaps we ought not to meet," I faltered.

"It depends altogether upon how you look at these things. If you take them all lightly, as we do in the world, and can keep them at flirtation point, they do not matter in the slightest degree, and leave no mark. But for you, who take them seriously, it is a question of whether you, under the circumstances of your life, would feel yourself degraded or no in having a lover. If you would, then it would be a sin and a dreadful pity for you; but if, being no more married to Humphrey now than I am, you chose to take Hugh, you might not feel you were doing anything wrong. It is

all in the point of view. If a woman has a lover, she breaks a law and every one who breaks a law pays a price; but the question is whether or no you think the happiness is worth the price of certain pain. That is what we have to consider now, since this rushing torrent has gone beyond the power of stemming. But I told you all this once before," she went on. "The question of rights and wrongs is arrived at by their effects upon the community, not only upon the individual. You must judge of that. Of course, I don't mean what religious people mean, but from a broad, common-sense view that looks only at ethical morality. Religious people look upon the marriage ceremony in church as a sacrament, therefore believe that it is a sin to break their vows under even the most extenuating circumstances. They don't realize the fact that the vows they made were upon intangible premises. It is perfectly impossible to be certain of continuing an emotion. No one can bid that come or go. A very strong will might control the outward demonstrations of it, perhaps—and numbers do, but for that you must have the real conviction that not to do so would be a sin."

I sighed. I was horribly disturbed.

"Do not misunderstand me, Guinevere. I think it is infinitely wiser for a woman never to take a lover, because I know that the breaking of any law brings corresponding punishment—and the law of the land is that fidelity is essential in the bond. The only point I want to make clear to you is, that the ethical and spiritual side is for your own consideration. You must decide what would hurt your personal soul in this, since you are no longer living with Humphrey as his wife. If you were, there could be no question as to the sin."

I laid my head against her knee again and Letitia bent and stroked my hair.

"Little sister," she went on, "I am a person of such crude common-sense that I felt I had to put the actual case before you, now that I see that things have gone too far to keep them on the level of just amusement. And you alone can decide what you ought to do."

"Yes, you are right," I agreed. "But no one, as a rule, dares to expound these views as you have done."

Letitia smiled.

"Naturally not," she said. "We are still under the dominion of hypocrisy; it has to go on until a better arrangement suggests itself for the good of the community. Mean-

while, we have got to be hypocrites and pretend what seems best. But these views are what nine-tenths of civilized people would agree with in their hearts, only they would never have the courage to admit it. We don't discuss these things in the world; they are understood, that is all. Nature is always the winner, or the destroyer, if you interfere with her."

"Letitia, Humphrey would think you were frightfully wicked, if he could hear you talk. Is it not strange, when he has broken that seventh commandment numbers of times in his youth, and probably would again now if he felt inclined?"

"Poor old Humphrey!" my sister rejoined. "He cannot help himself; he belongs to that generation in which each man had laid down a law as of the Medes and Persians that his own sisters and wife must be entirely chaste, while he himself felt perfectly free to try and undermine the virtue of every other man's wife and sister. Their sense of humor had a good deal lapsed, it would seem."

"And if you expounded these views to your friends—the Duchess, 'Winnie,' and Lady Marjoribanks, for instance—would they be shocked?" I asked. "Because some of them have had lovers, haven't they?"

"Of course they have, but they would be dreadfully shocked to have to admit that it was because they did not think it was ethically wrong. They prefer to ignore the subject altogether, and not mix up conscience with it. It is frightfully bad form to have the courage to state honest unorthodox views and act up to them. It is much better taste to be unmoral—secretly thinking yourself immoral, but not facing the fact."

"That seems to me to be perfectly frightful and degrading," I said feelingly.

"Well, they aren't very high-souled, are they, pet?" And Letitia laughed. "But they are not bad sorts, and we are not their judges. Ada is very religious, and does endless good on her husband's property, and is loved of all old women. She is absolutely a lady, you know. Poor old Ermyntrude is so vague and artistic; but she is kindly, too. And Winnie, who isn't really quite—quite, underneath, gives thousands of public moral charities and opens bazaars and *crèches* and what-not all the year round. God will judge us all, I expect, and give us our rewards."

"Letitia, you are a dear!" I exclaimed.

"It is quite time I went to bed—and you, too," she returned, and patted my hair, which was hanging down in a

long plait. "Guinevere, I never saw a woman look so young as you do. No one would take you for more than eighteen to-night, in that white dressing-gown, and by all the laws you ought to be withered and old-maidish, having had so little joy in life."

"I have been awfully happy since the spring," I told her, as we went through my room and along the endless twisted corridors to the other part of the house—Letitia is afraid to creep back alone, with only a candle, she says, as all lights, by Humphrey's orders, are put out at half-past ten o'clock.

"Complete happiness for you is bound to come—and perhaps complete misery—with your serious temperament, little sister," she said, kissing me good night in her room. "Well, I will help you to the first, since things are now inevitable, and see you through the other, if it happens. Bless you, pet!"

And all the way back here to my turret chamber her words have rung in my ears. Well, I must leave all things to fate, and be true to myself and what I think ethically right. There is one thing I know: not for any happiness in this world would I degrade my own soul, were I given the choice. I love Hugh utterly and forever, and I belong to him for that reason, and to him alone. And oh! the joy to make him perfectly happy, the glory and the pride I shall find in surrender; giving him that supreme gift of myself when he shall ask it of me, in perfect faith and trust.

. . . . . .

When I looked out of the east window this morning to say my prayers, I saw with a great heart-bound that the flag of the Dremonts waved from the staff above the trees.

Hugh was there! And I knew I should see him soon!

Letitia received a note from him, by hand, when I went up to her after I had poured out the coffee at the general breakfast. He had called at Norfolk Street before coming down yesterday, it appeared, and had been told she was at Redwood. She did not read the letter aloud, but she smiled mischievously.

"Leave it to me, Guinevere," she said. "Now tell Humphrey to come up and chat to me for a moment before the guns start. He won't be able to refuse me anything in this attractive cap."

Letitia looks too adorable at her breakfast. She has every becoming arrangement one could think of to enhance her every charm and conceal any small defect of age. Hum-

phrey honestly thinks her the finest and most charming woman he knows—which she is.

I felt light-hearted as a girl as I ran down the stairs with my message, and though Humphrey growled and mumbled something about the utter inconsiderateness of women—just when men were going to start—he mounted the stairs, not ill-pleased underneath.

Algernon has gone to Eton three days ago; otherwise, how delighted he would have been to kill his first partridge! He is going to be a fine shot, his father says.

Our party is quite agreeable—amiable wives of guns for the most part, but easy to entertain—and only two of them, besides Letitia, decided to come out to lunch, as it was still threatening to rain; and as we walked up to the old barn, where the trestled tables were laid out, a tremendous quiver came over me and made me stammer in the middle of a sentence, for there in the wide doorway, leaning against the rough oak, waiting for us, was Hugh Dremont!

"It was so good of the General to send over to me," he said politely, as he shook hands. "I am just down for a day or two, and wanted to see you all again. I am not going to shoot, only to lunch, and walk with you afterward. Ah! how do you do, Lady Langthorpe?" as Letitia came up.

And both their eyes were full of sprightly understanding as they greeted each other, while such joy flooded my being that at first I could not speak.

"Do you see them coming?" one of the ladies asked. "Could we not go and meet them down the lane?"

"Yes, do let us," Letitia agreed, drawing the other woman into her group, too, while, murmuring I must just look at the lunch table, I went into the barn, followed by Hugh.

The servants were there, so we chaffed a few words, and then went out again and sat on a low stone wall, where we could see the sportsmen when they should come in sight from afar.

And then we turned and looked at each other.

"Oh! my darling!" was all Hugh said. And "At last!" I cried.

Then our sentences came quickly: questions from him, and answers from me:

Was I well? Did I love him? Had I missed him? Was I glad to see him? and a dozen more tender things; and then, satisfied with my replies, he burst forth with his tale of the impossible summer he had passed; the daily fighting down his mad longing to come to me; and how twice it had mastered him, and he had returned to Minton Dremont, and there

conquered it and gone back again without seeing me; but that at last his will was at an end, since fate made it imperative that he should return to his home.

"I thought I loved you as much as it was possible, in London, Guinevere," he said passionately, "but I know that each day since we parted you have grown more dear."

"And you, also, Hugh," I whispered—and down on the stone wall he pressed my hand.

He is looking bronzed and well, my Beloved One, and more attractive to me than ever, and his voice fills me with joy and contentment; and when I meet his eyes, I thrill, and—oh! I love him, I love him with the essence of my life.

We had not time for anything more, for the group of guns came in view, and we walked forward to meet them, returning *en masse* for lunch. But I knew that Letitia would arrange that I should have a chance of talking during the afternoon, somehow; and she did.

I stood with Humphrey, as is his wish always on the rare occasions I have ever been out shooting with him, because we have not been in England for so long; but just before the two last drives, one of the ladies, Mrs. Hepburn, said she was cold and tired, and wished to go back, and my husband, put out at any disturbance of his plans, asked Hugh, who knows all this country, to show us the way home, and Letitia said she would come, too, leaving Mrs. Monroe to stay with the guns. Letitia had stood with Hugh all the time, creating quite the impression that he had come there only to see her. So now we four started across the fields toward a wood, but before we got there we had, by her skilful manœuvring, divided into two and two.

"We can't go wrong right through these trees, if we stick to the path, can we, Hugh?" she asked. "Mrs. Hepburn and I are so cold, we want to run on for a little and get our circulation up; but Guinevere hates walking fast."

He assured her they would be perfectly safe, and thus, after a few seconds, we were at last left alone.

CHAPTER XVI

THE shadows in the wood made it quite dusky, and the sky was heavy with clouds. The very instant the pair in front were out of sight, Hugh stretched out his hands and took my hands.

"Oh! the hunger of it!" he said, very low, as if the words were wrenched from his heart; and we could neither of us speak coherently, we were both so moved.

"And to think that when we have come through this wood and crossed a few fields, we shall have to play the comedy again, and I may not even touch your fingers! Oh! Guinevere, it is torture, is it not?"

The mighty workings of passion had carried us both on so far from that night in Hugh's sitting-room, when he had told me he would try to keep his love within the bounds that could never bring me sorrow. But I could not reproach him with that; we had gone together along the same road.

"Yes, it is anguish," I agreed. "But now that I have seen you, I can bear it better. As the days went on, after the ache began again, the longing for you to come was almost more than I could bear."

"My darling!"

"Hugh, we must not look ahead—the situation is too impossible. Let us be happy again now for this short while, and never live in anything but the actual moment."

"Ah! if we can. But I am mad, I think, Guinevere. I hardly sleep at all, some nights. At Cowes on the yacht, it was simply sickening on these moonlight evenings. I did not believe a passionate love for a woman could bring a man such pain. Then I went to Scotland, and walked the whole party off their legs, to try and get tired enough to be indifferent to emotion."

"And I have read books—and played tennis—and nearly

strangled Petrov once or twice. He was the only thing that comforted me; he seemed to know and sympathize."

"What are we to do?"

Unconsciously we had walked a few paces fast, but when he said this he made me pause, and drew me down to sit beside him on a fallen log.

"Guinevere, what are we to do?" he repeated again.

I could only look at him in pitiful distress. He was suffering so—my darling one!

Then he suddenly covered his face with his hands.

"Oh! what a weakling I am!" he cried brokenly. "I who should be strong and take care of you—so fragile and tender. And the purgatory and frightful unrest I have been through have brought me to this, that I hurt you instead of comforting you. Forgive me, darling child."

Of course I told him that I forgave him. But that we must try and be grateful for just meeting, and not spoil the time by being so unhappy.

"Yes, you are right, Guinevere," he agreed. "And I will conquer all this presently, and try again only to bring you joy. But there is no solace for us here in the wood—I may not even hold your dear hand, with the chance of any stray beater about. I must always think of you, sweetheart. Now, tell me everything you have done since we parted—every little thing."

I tried to do so, but a delicious, dream-like happiness was stealing over me with the knowledge of his presence, and made my words come slow.

Then he told me of all his thoughts of me; how they had never left me, and how utterly meaningless everything seemed that he had done and suffered during the long months.

"I have been fighting all this time," he said, "but I shall not try to do so any more—it is not possible. I shall see you whenever it can be arranged with safety. I am going away Friday again, but in a week I shall return, and then I shall stay. One might as well be dead as to go on suffering the torture of this separation."

I could only acquiesce; it was entirely what I felt, too.

Then we were much happier, saying love things to each other for a few minutes, until we both realized we must not linger any more, but go on through the wood.

"You look too sweet in that short skirt, Guinevere," Hugh told me, as we walked along. "But you seem to have got thinner, dear. Are you sure you have been well?"—and his voice was anxious.

"Yes, I have been well; but I think this place, and the damp of it do not suit me quite. I feel very tired always and stupid—like that."

"Darling, you ought to go to the South for the winter. With the autumn fogs coming on, how will you bear it? Minton Dremont is on so much higher ground, it seems to be a different climate always to Redwood. I must discuss with Letitia what we can possibly suggest for you." And his dear face was full of concern and pain.

"There would not be the least use, Hugh. Humphrey says Redwood Moat has been good enough for the Bohuns for four hundred years, and is to be good enough for them to the end of time. Unless I were actually seriously ill, as I was in India, he would not hear of my going to the South of France. And I am not ill, you know; only listless rather—but now that you have come, it will be all changed. You are the sunshine for me, Hugh."

He could hardly speak, he was so moved. But then I could see he put a strong control upon himself and tried to be gay for the rest of our walk, and when we reached the drawbridge I felt all the blood running in my veins with joy and the brisk exercise; and Hugh looked more content.

"The General has asked me to return and dine," he said, as we mounted the front doorsteps. "But the guns will not be in for another hour. May I come up into your little turret room for a while? I will come by the steps straight from the garden—Letitia said that would be perfectly simple—and it would be so divine to see you there just once."

I felt a sudden thrill. How clever Letitia is! Yes, it would be possible—the lady guests would be in their rooms, and I would not be expected to go down until tea, at half-past five; and as soon as Parton had removed my shooting things and given me a tea-gown, she would go off to her own tea at half-past four—miles away in the other part of the house. The temptation was too great to resist.

"Yes," I answered, catching my breath. "Don't come in with me now, then; go into the garden and wait, and in a quarter of an hour come straight up the stairs."

The great clock chimed quarter-past four—that would give me just time, as Parton is a punctual person, and would not delay a moment from her tea.

Hugh turned and left me, casually going across the courtyard toward the stables, and I bounded up the great stairs to my wing, a strange excitement now in my heart.

There I found Parton already laying out my things, and Letitia warming her hands by the fire.

"You should have a little rest, Guinevere," she said. "That big hooded chair in your shrine in a delightful place to doze in. I am going to have a sleep until tea. Don't let them disturb Mrs. Bohun until after five o'clock, Parton," she added, as she walked toward the door, "She is tired out."

And my maid agreed, and soon I was ready, in a quiet gray tea-gown, and Parton left me in peace, sitting in the old magenta-covered chair, with a blazing fire of logs and the curtains drawn over the windows, while Petrov purred upon my knee.

Then my heart began to beat to suffocation, for I heard Hugh's steps coming softly up the stairs.

The little narrow door was oiled long ago, because I hate noises, and it moves silently on its old iron hinges.

I do not know what he could have seen in my expression as I stood up, trembling, ready to greet him, for he held me from him, and his face, from the passionate gladness of its expression as he entered, became quite pale and stern.

"Dear heart," he said, "you are full of fear! Guinevere, my darling, trust me, I implore you! I worship you, you know, and am not altogether a brute."

"Oh! Hugh," I half sobbed, as I buried my face on his breast.

And when he had kissed me with divine tenderness, he made me return to the chair again, and himself drew a low oak seat that is one of my new acquisitions close to my side, and there sat down, stretching out his long limbs toward the blaze. Then I put out my hand and rather timidly caressed his hair. It is so thick and smooth—only a slight wave where it is brushed back from his broad forehead. I have always wanted to touch his hair.

He turned to me eyes full of absolute adoration.

"Oh! how blessed!" he said gently. "To rest here after the stress of the day, and to have you touch me like that. You have angel fingers, Guinevere. My mother used to stroke my hair when I was a boy."

"Isn't it peaceful, Hugh?" I responded, my heart quite calm and happy now, the excitement all fled. "And we have a whole half-hour in perfect security, and I promise not to be nervous once. Do you remember how silly I was, starting like that in Richmond Park?"

I would have wished him to read to me, but there was not enough light—only the blazing logs. So we talked to one

another, all sorts of beautiful tenderness; and never once did Hugh lose control of himself, even when presently I let him clasp me in his arms and kiss me to his heart's content.

But his voice was frightfully deep when at length he got up to go, as five o'clock struck, and it trembled ominously.

"Guinevere," he whispered. "Darling, I have shown you now that I can master myself—because I love you so. But I am only human; I will not come again up here—I could not bear it—Guinevere—you have not forgotten what you promised me in London, have you, dear?"

He held me from him and looked into my eyes.

"I said—there was only to be your will, Hugh," I answered him, hardly aloud.

And, almost crushing me in his arms, he turned and went to the staircase door. There he halted a minute.

"Then fate will arrange," he whispered, and went softly from the room.

. . . . . .

It is Christmas Day—a gray day, with a wind and a ruffled sea. Oh! how long since I have written, or thought, or even breathed! We are here in the South of France, after all, and I have been so ill.

But there is nothing the matter with my lungs, the doctor says, now that the pneumonia is cured; only I must get well in the sunlight. And never since that September afternoon have I seen my Beloved.

Ah! I cannot go back and pick up the threads, one by one, of how a chill, caught and neglected the following day of the shoot, commenced the gradual lowering of my vitality and left me a prey to whatever evil thing was passing. And before Hugh returned again to Minton Dremont, I was very ill.

Letitia came back and comforted me like an angel. One would not have supposed that she, with all the cares of her great position, could have found time—but she did. And Hugh was nearly crazy, it seems, and stayed during the whole period at Minton Dremont, all alone, getting news daily. But the circumstances were too difficult for us to meet—even Letitia admitted that. For as soon as I could be moved, in the beginning of November, we came here to St. Raphael, and I was too weak to stand any excitement, she feared. Then she had herself to leave me, and Humphrey's old sister took her place.

My husband has felt it a personal insult to himself and his house, my having been so ill. And when the actual danger to my life was over, he let me understand this, if not

in words. I heard continual stories of the strength and hardiness of his mother and all those Bohun ladies who had gone before. And then, when the doctor said it was absolutely necessary that I should go to the South for a while, Humphrey had an explosion of rage. With all his new hunters eating their heads off in the stable, and in the first year of his return to his ancestral home, to have a wife who chose that time to get some trumpery illness, and then require to go to a beastly foreign country to recoup, was more than a man could bear! I heard all this, and I was still so weak that it made me cry. I felt the truth of my shortcomings. But a compromise was arrived at when Letitia announced her intention of seeing me safely settled at St. Raphael, and Miss Araminta Bohun consented to join me when my sister must leave. In this way, Humphrey was enabled to remain at home, and looked forward to having Algernon for the Christmas holidays, and continuous hunting—all to himself.

So Letitia and I came here, and life crept back to me, assisted greatly by the tenderest letters from Hugh.

But since my sister left, three weeks ago, I have not been able to receive many. They must come in hers—I would not trust Miss Araminta Bohun. She has the curiosity of all disappointed old maids, and while I was too feeble to interfere, sorted out all the correspondence for us both which arrived, scrutinizing each envelope with a gimlet eye.

Letitia's last words have been a comfort to me:

"Do not fret or grieve, darling," she said. "You know Hugh is thinking only of you from morning to night, and the first moment there is a sensible chance, he will come to you. After all, you have your whole lives before you both; you need not hurry to meet, and cause things to be so impossible that you cannot go on doing so."

And with this I have to be content. But to-day, Christmas Day, has brought a strange depression. It is to me always a melancholy time. I have no memories of joy with it.

We have been to church, where the stiff old English parson discoursed upon the graves of loved ones far away.

Then my sister-in-law wore a solemn air at *déjeuner*. The whole thing—foreign hotel, food at unusual hours, and no holly or mistletoe—has jarred upon her unbearably. She is sixty-four, Araminta, and as hardy as an Alpine annual; but she hates to have her habits upset.

She read me a homily after breakfast, in our sitting-room, and all the time the tears were so near to my eyes that now at last I have crept here to my room to be alone. I cannot,

cannot pretend any longer. I cannot crush the cruel ache in my heart, the void in my soul. For whenever I do see you, oh my Beloved, it will be a snatch, and a frightful unrest, knowing the moments will be transient and the longing must begin all over again. The post is late to-day and has not yet come in. Perhaps I shall hear from you—that may comfort my heart. But, meanwhile, I am alone, and outside is the sorrowful sea and the soughing wind in the fir-trees.

One can suppress love, I suppose, if one is strong, and encourage diversion and excite the intellect; but the god will come to his own, and then, as to-day, one lies prostrate, ready to make any bargains with fate, for the sight of a face, the sound of a voice; for the clasp of strong arms and the pressing of dear lips; when nothing in the world consoles one; when one can only crouch in one's cave, too deeply anguished for tears.

. . . . . .

Dawn has brokén; the mood of the weather has changed; there is not a cloud in the sky or a ripple on the sea, and the glorious sun rises above the dark velvet of the fir-trees. Has it come to warm my frozen soul? Is it a message of hope, that I may read from its splendors that life will smile again some day for me—even for me, too—and that I may soon see my Beloved?

. . . . . .

The Christmas letters only came in just now, by the first post the day after; and there is one from Hugh which would comfort any woman.

He longs for me, just as I long for him. He has a party at Minton Dremont—a family party—and Lord Burbridge, his nephew, and Algernon, both back from Eton, are having the most sporting time together.

Hugh proposes to run out to Monte Carlo and stay at St. Raphael on the way, pretending his motor has broken down, because, as he says, he *cannot* any longer bear the torment of not seeing me. So by New Year's Day I am to expect a surprise visit. He will arrive about luncheon time, and hopes somehow I will be able to arrange to see him alone.

Although I am not at all strong yet, I wrote him out a telegram, and took it into the town myself to send off. Just to say he would find me on January the first out on the far rocks at the *Lion de terre,* at two o'clock, if he motored that way and came to look for me. And then I struggled back to the hotel and lay on my bed, exhausted. But I must make

beginning of going out by myself, so as to be strong enough o get to the rocks in these few days' time. The joy of the hought! I have no further room for *tristesse*. What will e look like? What will he say to me, when he comes, in ix days from now?

. . . . . .

Alas! it seems that I am not to be happy. Hugh broke his ollar-bone out hunting, two days after Christmas, and can- ot move just yet. Letitia wrote to me a long account of it, nd of his bitter disappointment. No wonder I was so mel- ncholy on Christmas Day! This was in the air. He will ome the moment he is better, she says, and so does his eft-hand pencilled note. But that cannot be for a few weeks.

The divine beauty of the scene which meets my eye each ime I look from my window only seems to mock me. It is aving been so ill, I suppose; I have lost my vitality.

By the same post which brought this blow to fall upon ne there came a letter from Humphrey, telling me he is to e sent with the Duke of Stornoway's mission to take the Garter to the new Emperor of Araucaria; he is full of ompous gratification. He will surely, he says, receive from he Emperor the Grand Cordon of the Blue Lion; and he oves orders and medals and that sort of thing. He pre- ends it is a bore having to start early in February, in the ull swing of the hunting season, but Algernon will have re- urned to Eton, and, after all, one must do one's duty to ne's country, he admits. He will be away until early in June, because he has been requested privately to visit certain erritories belonging to England, leaving the mission on the way back, so as to give his opinion upon the defences in hem.

"I suppose you will be well by that time," he wrote, "and able once more to fulfil your duties at home."

I suppose so. But meanwhile, for nearly four months, I shall be free! A great sigh came to my lips, of sudden re- lief and comfort, when I realized this.

We had settled to return to England on the first of Feb- ruary, in any case, as my sister-in-law Araminta can no longer remain away from Bath and her home comforts, and finds that to be a companion to a convalescent who has to be considered is not an occupation which is agreeable to her.

I wrote all my sympathy and congratulations to Hum- phrey, and said I would come back to see him off. And so the days drone on; but there is a sense of suppressed excite- ment. Letitia has a surprise for me, she says. She has

arranged with Humphrey that she is to stay with me at Redwood, or I am to stay with her in London, or in Cheshire, during all the time of my husband's absence. And that means that I shall certainly see Hugh. His right arm is still strapped to his side, and his left-hand little scribbles are difficult to read; but they are loving, and each one makes me happy.

Ever since this news came of my prospective months of holiday I have been growing better. Now I can walk as far as the rocks with no great fatigue, and Parton assures me I am not nearly so pale and thin.

I have the kind of feeling that Hugh is suppressing all great signs of emotion, but that a furnace is burning underneath; and as the days approach for my arrival in England I feel so excited I can hardly sleep.

It appears he has seen a very great deal of Humphrey and Algernon this winter—Algernon especially.

"They have strange traits, both of them," he wrote in one of his letters. "They are so suspicious of every one's motives; and over animals they are both rather brutes. But they have the pluck of the devil in the hunting-field, and one has a sort of hard admiration for them—but as guardians for my fragile Guinevere, they could hardly be more unsuitable." And then, in another letter: "It makes me boil with rage to hear the General speaking of women—with his cynical brutal contempt of them. And to think you, my darling, have had to endure that atmosphere for all these years!"

To-morrow we leave for Paris, and by Thursday evening, I shall be in Norfolk Street, where Humphrey, who is in London making his preparations, will come to see me, and then leave me with Letitia when he starts off.

He is so full of himself and his mission that he has not had time to think jealously of my being away from him, as once he would have done, although he has no more emotion for me himself. But he is jealous over everything which belongs to him, as are all egotistical people, I expect.

And to think that the next time I can write, it will be in England, and with the prospect of seeing Hugh! Ah! me, it is good to be alive, after all!

CHAPTER XVII

FEBRUARY, 1906

AND so we are at Redwood Moat again, and Humphrey is on his way to his far destination. Algernon and I waved to him from the station platform, and then my son went back to Eton, and I rejoined Letitia in Norfolk Street; and the next day came down here. It is the tenth of February, 1906. Why do I write the date, I wonder?—and to-morrow I shall see Hugh!

Petrov's joy at my return is sweet to see. He has moped and grown quite thin during my absence. The house seems terribly damp and cold, and Letitia shivers. She had intended to have a rest-cure here with me, she said, before an unusual busy London season; but to-night she has spent the time since dinner in writing a long epistle to Hugh. He is at Minton Dremont, and to-morrow comes over to lunch with us, so why she had to write to him to-night I did not at first guess.

"Guinevere," she said just now, sniffing the air, "I am sure there is something wrong with the water in the moat; it is dreadfully unhealthy, and the worst possible thing for you, still so delicate as you are. I noticed it this afternoon, and spoke to Hartington about it, and he said it would be a perfect mercy now to have the moat cleaned out all round, if only the family could be away. He said 'Sir Hugh Dremont' had remarked it, too, the last time he was over with the master,' and he, Hartington, had 'made so bold' as to say to Sir Hugh that he thought it a pity for the mistress to be here now, in the bad weather, with it in this state, and Sir Hugh had agreed with him. It would only take 'a matter of three weeks or so' to do it, he said, if only 'the mistress' would consent to go somewhere else; and that Sir Hugh had said why should not 'the family'—meaning you and me, of

course, Guinevere—go and stop for the time at Minton Dremont? It was big enough, in all conscience, and he would not be having visitors, and they could be as quiet as they pleased. Hartington and I discussed the whole thing, and settled it together, so now I have written to Hugh to say the plan seems awfully good to me, and he had better try and persuade you into it to-morrow at luncheon. What do you say? I am going to have the letter sent over in the morning."

I was simply overcome—it sounded as if an angel from heaven had descended and asked me to go and spend some time in Paradise.

"Humphrey left Hartington more or less in charge of everything," I blurted out, "so, if he thinks it a good idea, I have nothing to say against it," and then a nervous, ecstatic laugh came to my lips. "Oh! Letitia, how divine!"

"Yes," returned my sister, in her most matter-of-fact tone. "The house is awfully comfortable, and Hugh is an angelic host, and will pet and cosset you back into robust health—you white, wretched-looking creature!"

Then she patted me and laughed.

"Doctor Burnley is coming in the morning, and he is sure to tell me he is quite of the same opinion as Hartington; so you see, it is your duty to go. I could not have remained in this haunted, gloomy place for my rest-cure, I tell you frankly, darling. Now go to bed; you look as pale as a ghost, Guinevere."

And I said I would, and she left me a few minutes ago here in my turret chamber, and I pulled aside the curtains of the east window and there saw, high over the tree-tops, one enormous star rising in the dark-blue sky, and it seemed like a message of joy and happiness.

. . . . . .

Hugh came a little before luncheon. I was up in my shrine, and I heard his and Letitia's voices on the stair, and she called to me, as once before she had done, and, as once before, I heard footsteps and knew the moment for reunion with my Beloved had come. I trembled so, I had to hold on to the back of the chair, as Hugh opened the door and strode toward me, with arms outstretched. But his glad cry was mixed with anguish when he looked into my face.

"Oh, my darling, how white you look—and small!"

And then we did not speak for a few minutes. There was the hunger and pain and agony of all these months to be assuaged, clasped in each other's arms.

Hugh's collar-bone is mended now, and he looked so

splendid and strong and well. And oh, his tenderness to me!—his fond anxiety over me; his protective, possessive adoration! It was worth having been ill for—it was worth anything in the world; and we hated to have to go down to luncheon, even, we had so much to say.

Letitia played the game before the servants with consummate skill. She announced Dr. Burnley's views, and appealed to Hartington, who seconded every word she said; and Hugh brought out his invitation with superb *sans gêne*, and before the meal was over it was settled that we should remove to Minton Dremont that very afternoon. "The sooner the better for Mrs. Bohun," Dr. Burnley had said, so Letitia informed us.

Hugh left immediately after lunch, to make everything ready for us.

"I must have you in my own wing, Letitia," he had said. "There are absolutely no draughts there, and Guinevere can go up and down those private stairs without getting cold. We shall dine in the small breakfast-room that I use when I am alone, so as to be cozy—don't you think so?"

And my sister agreed to all these things.

When the time to start arrived—four o'clock and just getting dusk—I felt quite sick with excitement. What would it be like—at Minton Dremont!

Hugh came forward to meet us in the hall, his eyes shining like stars, and everywhere there was warmth and brightness and quantities of flowers; and we had tea in the morning-room which opens into that ante-chamber where the trophies of sport hang.

A shy joy and silence was upon me—and a perfect sense of safety and peace. The superlative happiness and rest, not to feel I must listen for coming interruptions and suffer that whole sense of fear and unease which rules the atmosphere at Redwood Moat!

Letitia is so admirable; she never neglects any of the points in any of her games. She did all the talking, saying Hugh might ask Gerald Northey down in a few days—Guinevere would be feeling better by then, and so would not be confused with conversation and visitors. And then she carried me off to my room, saying I might change into a tea-gown and rest there, if I liked, or, on Hugh's suggestion, would find the most comfortable sofa by the log fire in his own sitting-room. The two of them spoilt and petted me as though I had been an invalid baby. I can never say how happy I felt.

My room, I found, was a most charming, rosy chintz place, with nothing of state and darkness in it. It might have been full summer, for the roses which great bowls were filled with—to have them for most of the year is one of Hugh's fads—and its windows, the housekeeper told us, as she showed us in, looked full south. It was perfectly quiet, too, with its bathroom and dressing-room next door, and Letitia in an equally comfortable apartment across the passage.

"You are next to me, Letitia," said Hugh, "so you can feel perfectly safe from burglars and ghosts in the night!"

We were so merry all the time, and I felt full of life and returning health, for happiness is a much greater doctor than ever Æsculapius could have been.

When finally I did get down into Hugh's sitting-room, at about six o'clock, he was there waiting for me.

It looked so comfortable and peaceful, with all the russet silk curtains drawn and just the big, softly shaded lamps and the crackling and glowing logs. And close to my sofa, which he had prepared for me with soft cushions, was a huge bunch of deep-red roses, giving forth a sweet, fresh scent.

"I would not have white ones to-day, sweetheart," Hugh said. "You are too pale yourself. And I am going to take care of you and love and worship you until they are no longer your prototype!"

He was as gentle as the tenderest nurse, and made me lie down and rest, while he sat beside me, holding and caressing my hand, and now and then my hair; and we talked of all sorts of beautiful things, and of our love, and of our happiness; and, finally, he read to me in a low voice, and gradually worn out with all the excitement, I fell into a blissful sleep.

When I awoke he was still sitting beside me, and his dear face wore an expression I have never seen on a human face before: it showed everything of love and devotion, and even a reverent awe.

"Guinevere," he whispered, "while you have slept I have been realizing the value of things. Darling, I do not think I ever knew before how much I loved you. And now, for this little while, I am going to take every possible shadow out of your life. I want you to promise me that you will never let your thoughts go on ahead. I want you to be as happy as the day is long."

"Indeed, I promise, Hugh."

Then we went up the stairs together to dress for dinner, and it seemed as if I must have always lived there—all felt so natural and at peace.

After dinner, Letitia and Hugh and I sat in the morning-oom, because there is a piano in it, and I wanted to play o them. I felt like that—I wanted to give forth all the hankfulness of my soul in beautiful sound. And they both at in comfortable chairs and listened in relaxed rest and njoyment.

I made the music tell them of all my thoughts, and once, vhen I glanced over at Letitia, I saw that her usually bright, nerry eyes were gazing into distance and full of a wistful ight. What was she thinking of, I wonder? Was she feel-ng that, whatever the pain it might bring, love like Hugh nd I have for each other was worth all the triumphs f the world? Poor, dear Letitia! But each one must dree is own weird. Hugh's lids were closed, and a look of erfect content was on his face. No three people could e happier together than we three are.

When I was following my sister out of the room, on the vay to bed, Hugh detained me for a second.

"My sweet," he said. "Now you must sleep and rest ompletely and grow strong here in my house; and remem-er, every slightest thing is to be as you wish, Guinevere. Do you understand exactly what I mean, darling child?"

A great, strange quiver came over me, and I could not neet his eyes, as I answered:

"Yes, Hugh."

Then, with perfect homage, he bent and kissed my hand.

"My love," he said, "good night."

And I left him standing by the fire.

. . . . . .

We have been here for a whole week, and it seems that I m perfectly well now, wooed back into health and vigor y Hugh's tenderest devotion. How he must love me! Not nce during this whole time have I ever seen more than momentary gleam of passion in his eyes. Every action, very thought has been of what is best for me; not to tire ie, not to weary me; what I must eat, when I must rest, ow can he best strengthen and amuse me.

We have taken little walks in the park—longer ones each ay—and we have examined every corner of the garden nd talked of my wishes for this mass of color or that in ie coming flowers—just as though I shall live here always nd it is all my own.

He has been out hunting only once—and he loves hunting i an ordinary way. His collar-bone is not firm yet, he ays! But I know that is not the reason. And one thing

has touched me most of all. When Parton came into my room on the morning after we arrived, she brought a large basket, from which emerged a strange sound; and when she opened the lid out sprang my own Petrov!

Then when I came down and thanked Hugh, he said, laughing:

"My Guinevere is nothing but a darling little old maid, and, I knew, would not be happy without her cat!"

But how dear of him it was, even to think of this small completion of my contentment.

Letitia is really having more or less of a rest-cure, and leaves us alone while she sleeps in her room until late in the day. And this afternoon that nice, frank, fresh young Mr. Northey—who came with us to Maidenhead—is arriving for a week or so. Hugh is going to mount him on some of his hunters, since he is not riding much himself.

I feel so gay, and my cheeks have grown almost pink.

. . . . . .

When I went down to tea, Mr. Northey had arrived and was conversing with Letitia, and a sprightly air was over everything. We had the merriest time possible, and I was joyous, and laughed, and made little sallies quite beyond my wont; and after it, I went with Hugh into his sitting-room to look for a book, and as I was bending down to get it out of the book-case, he suddenly seized me in his arms, while his eyes looked as they had looked on the river in the moonlight.

"Ah!" he said—and that was all. But his lips almost burned my lips, and my heart suddenly began to beat wildly with I know not what, and I struggled away from him—but it was not from fear. Then I ran like a fawn, bounding lightly over a footstool that was near, and out of the door and up to my room, while his voice called after me in anxiety:

"Guinevere!"

I cannot imagine what made me do this—human nature is very strange. I could not make myself go down again, but sat crouching by the fire in some nameless intense excitement, until Parton came in, when the dressing-gong sounded.

I put on my white and silver gown, with the red rose stuck in my hair, as for the Whitsuntide dance last year, and every emotion which has been slumbering during this week of peace and convalescence seemed to be awakening in my heart.

Letitia came to fetch me to go down the stairs. She, too, was festively attired, and she laughed as she linked her arm in mine, while she looked critically at me and said:

"How bright your eyes are to-night, Guinevere!"

At dinner my mood was even more sparkling than it had been at tea, and I was conscious that my cheeks were burning and my hands as cold as ice.

Hugh and Mr. Northey had both put on their evening hunt coats, we found, when we got to the morning-room, where they were awaiting us. We had joked at tea about the "party" we meant to have.

Hugh's eyes sought mine in anxious, questioning pleading. I knew he was trying to fathom if I was angry with him; and that unknown and hitherto undreamed-of feminine something in me would not let me give him the satisfaction of seeing that I was not. And all through dinner I would not meet his glance. I look back now at my behavior and wonder at myself. It was all primitive instinct, the instinct which made the Swift One in Jack London's wonderful "Before Adam" rush through the trees. Afterwards, I played the piano when Letitia and I were alone, waiting for the other two; and they were such mad things which came to my finger-tips. And I saw Letitia's eyes fixed upon me with a strange, comprehensive look, as much as to say, "I understand you, Guinevere, even if you do not understand yourself." And this quieted me a little.

When the two men did join us, Letitia drew Mr. Northey over to talk to her, and Hugh came and leaned upon the piano; and his face was full of suppressed emotion—not altogether pain.

"May I show Mr. Northey the pictures in the saloon, Hugh?" Letitia asked suddenly. "We can turn on the lights as we go through, if they are not lit." And she rose and went toward the door, followed by both of the men.

I played on all the time, my heart beating now to suffocation almost; and in a minute or two Hugh returned and, shutting the door after him, came across the room.

He stood beside the piano silently, looking at me with all his soul in his eyes, and my fingers would obey me no longer, but convulsively clasped together in my lap.

"Guinevere—" Hugh said breathlessly; and then again, "Guinevere——?"

And something in me stronger than all other things that have ever touched my life made me rise and hold out my arms to him.

CHAPTER XVIII

I WONDER if angels in heaven can be any happier than Hugh and I are. The souls of Adam and Eve in Paradise could not have been more divinely exalted or more completely necessary to each other.

As the days pass, everything takes on a fresh meaning. The whole essencé of life is being revealed to me through love and—My Lover. We have been too engaged with each other to take in any outside circumstance, though, vaguely, and gladly, we have observed that Mr. Northey has amused Letitia, who has not been bored. We four, for a whole fortnight, have laughed and ridden, and been gay together, and all has gone well.

Hugh and I garden in the morning—or what we call gardening, which is walking round every separate bed and site and greenhouse, and discussing how we can improve this and that. And then we have a canter in the park and Corlston Chase, he on Cæsar and I on Jenny Wren. Or we wander all over the house, if it pours with rain, and I suggest touches here and there, though it would be difficult to make it more perfect. And I am getting to know every one of Hugh's idiosyncrasies; his dear little selfishnesses—his fads—his generosity—and his point of view. He is masterful and tender with me, making me always do what he wants and then asking me if it isn't what I want—and of course it always is!

When Humphrey, without consulting my wishes, ordered me to do a thing, I obeyed in the beginning from sheer fear, and afterward for peace; though always resentfully or rebelliously. But I adore it when Hugh orders me about; it gives the exquisite sense of possession, though I feel as if I wished to do the very thing he is commanding, on my own account. Hugh knows this, and craftily plays upon my

emotions over it, to our mutual enchantment. He has such dear ways! And after being a frozen stone, and cold as ice for thirty-one years, it is so unspeakably divine to allow myself to melt and revel in warmth and affection. He takes the deepest interest in everything about me—the least detail of my clothes, even. He seems to want to share with me to the last thoughts of our souls. And every day we read some beautiful book together, spending whole hours in the library or his sitting-room, getting down this one and that, and finding out pet pages in it; and we discuss all the points, and give each other fresh views. Then he tells me of his duties in the county, and among his people, and how he thinks they ought to be fulfilled; and of the duties of Englishmen generally—each one to justify his place and complete a noble whole. And we discuss problems of ethics, and our views upon principles of life and the meaning of things. It seems, as Hugh says, that we have each provided the igniting spark for the other's stored thoughts, and our perfect sympathy together brings them forth.

And nothing could be more refined and careful and protective than is his attitude to me before people—the servants, and even Letitia and Mr. Northey. Not by a word or look does he suggest anything but respectful friendship. There is a great deal in breeding; it makes all the small things of life between two people move without jars. I thought of this definition of a gentleman the other morning, when something exceptional cropped up. "What is it that makes a man a gentleman? It is having that instinctive knowledge of correct behavior and high honor which does not even require an unwritten law as a guide." It could hardly be more exemplified than it is in Hugh.

Letitia and I talk together in her room at night sometimes; it seems almost as if she were changing, too, in this atmosphere of peace and love. She says she never really knew Hugh before, although they have been friends for ten years, and that none of her friends would recognize him as he is with us now.

"I said long ago that you were a witch, Guinevere," she said. "Do you remember? I said it in play, but it is true, it would seem, because you have altered and brought out and completed this man, who is thirty-six years old, and has been spoilt and worshipped by women, ruled men, and hunted wild beasts all his life!"

I laughed my contentment.

"I really believe you were made for one another, and that

neither of you will ever love any one else," she went on meditatively. "It is a thousand pities, in a case like this, that you cannot marry each other."

I felt a quiver of pain, the first one that has come. Letitia saw it, and added hurriedly:

"Well, never mind, pet. After all, you are going to be happy for three months now, at least—and that is more than most women get out of life."

My will reasserted itself and banished the pain.

"Gerald Northey is the best tonic I have had for years," Letitia continued. "He completes my rest-cure. He is as fresh as new-mown hay, and he thinks I am such an angel that, of course, I have to be one. This charming time we are having will set me up for the whole season. Such a mercy his not coming to London often, too! I can keep him as a sort of out-door, thoroughly healthy pastime, perhaps for two or three years. I won't let the others even see him—they would tarnish him at once."

I thought how true this was, and how strong Hugh must be really, not to have become irreclaimably tarnished after receiving their incense for over ten years.

I am not allowed to go and see what is happening at Redwood. Hugh rides over and consults with Hartington every few days. It appears the moat cannot possibly be finished for another fortnight at least. They are discovering wonderful things in their draggings, among them in the dry mud at the side a skeleton by the wall just under the west window of the turret, and some links of chain near. Could this be the poor Cavalier? It was never understood what eventually became of him; he remained one of those mysteries like Kőnigsmarck was for so many years, until that hapless lover's body was discovered buried beneath the very threshold his unhappy Sophia was constantly obliged to pass over—a fiendish irony which Humphrey, I remember, chuckled at when, a long time ago, he happened to read this in a book. The Bohun spirit would enjoy situations like that. It is there in Humphrey and my son probably as strong as ever, after all these hundreds of years.

Dear old Doctor Burnley came to see me this morning, and said he was completely taken off his feet with surprise at my appearance. I was growing as robust as my sister, and looked like a blooming girl.

"How right you were, doctor, to insist upon her coming up here, weren't you?" Letitia said innocently. "I shall tell

the General how clever and sensible you have been with Mrs. Bohun."

And the doctor smiled, well pleased to accept this burden of praise.

Hugh has had a piano moved into his own sitting-room, because after tea one of his supreme pleasures is for me to play to him while he sits in a big chair near. He does not doze, like Humphrey; he listens to every note, and we go together into the most exquisite dreamlands. And when I have finished we sit on the sofa, side by side, and he reads to me, and although we could both say all Rossetti's Sonnets by heart, we read these often, because now we know what every one of them means.

One afternoon he had a fall while trying a new horse over a hurdle; he was not hurt really, but his temples ached a little, and I made him lie on the sofa and put his dear head on my breast while I held and petted and caressed him as though he had been a tired baby—Oh! the exquisite tenderness of that memory.

Hugh has had my photographs framed in a case which he keeps locked. He has taken some more of me, too, and they are wonderfully like. We developed them ourselves in his dark room, and had such fun over it, and made such a mess. The best of all is a large full plate of me absolutely comfortable on the sofa, reading, and it shows the panelling of the room and one of the Van der Veldes as a background.

"I love this one most, darling," Hugh said when we first printed it. "I shall always look at it when we have to be separated. It seems exactly as if you must be really my wife in it—lying there so at rest upon your sofa in my room."

I thrilled.

"I never think of you as anything else but that, sweetheart, you know." And he held my face in his hands and looked with the purest reverence down into my eyes. "And I am a great deal more than a lover now, am I not, Guinevere?"

"You are everything, Hugh—the whole of my life. It is simply ridiculous and meaningless to suppose I could ever, or have ever belonged to any one else. I had no more choice about marrying Humphrey than a baby would have had. I hated the idea always, and had not the faintest notion what marriage meant, in any case. And it is only by law that I am bound to him still as a slave, before the world—there is no marriage between us; there has not been

for nearly ten years. I believe he would be very glad to get rid of me if it were 'the thing to do.' But he would kill me without a moment's hesitation if he knew that I had a lover—he has often told me he would. He has not the slightest sense of justice; he would kill me to avenge the Bohun vanity—that is all."

Hugh's eyes grew black and fierce.

"Oh! the cruelty of it!" he said. "And yet, how could the law be altered to fit all cases?" Then he went on in his just, even way: "To have no marriage law, or divorces like the Americans have, would bring chaos to England, I suppose."

"Hugh," I said, "I am certain that everything which happens to us is the result of our own action in this life or some other. Many of the things we suffer we have actually drawn to ourselves in this existence before we knew or realized the law of cause and effect. I do not feel the least a sinner in having you for my dear lover, circumstances being as they are, but I should feel one if I were hurting even Humphrey, whom I almost hate, or Algernon, whom I almost love."

"Dear little girl—reasoning it all out!" Hugh smiled tenderly. "I am different to you. I have not reasoned anything; I have just loved you without caring or counting any cost—except to you, Beloved One. I will always think of costs for you. When the General comes back——"

But I put my hand over his mouth gently.

"Hush!" I said. "We are not going to think or talk of that yet. He has not been gone four weeks, and he does not return until June. Please, let us forget that there is any time after that—or, rather, I mean to live until then as if joy was going on forever. You told me to, Hugh."

"Yes, this is much the best way," he agreed. "We will both stop our thoughts if they wander to any speculations. Now, come out and see the new vine being put in, where the old one died. We shall have splendid grapes on it in two years' time."

. . . . . .

Letitia and I have been at Minton Dremont for over four weeks, and the moat at Redwood is not finished yet; and Letitia proposed we should go up to London in a few days and go to the theatres. It is early March now, and most people are away abroad. Her friends, at all events, are not there *en bande*, and will not be so likely to concern themselves at our doings.

"Langthorpe will be back from Monte Carlo," Letitia said, "and I want to see the old boy for a little. There are several boring dinners I give, too, at this time of the year. It saves my duties in the season."

So we all motored up to London, leaving Petrov safely under the housekeeper's charge at Minton Dremont.

My heart was heavy at leaving, although I should still see my lover every day, probably. But nothing could be so perfect as being at peace in his own house. Hugh was very depressed, too, the last evening. He and I sat alone in his sitting-room—Mr. Northey had gone, and Letitia retired early after dinner.

Hugh would not even let me play to him. He could not bear me to be so far away, and we sat like two children before the fire on the sofa, with arms entwined.

"There is something about the spring-time, with everything beginning to grow, which affects one strangely, does it not, Guinevere?" Hugh said. "The buds are all swollen in the hedges, ready to burst forth soon, and the infant lambs are quite frolicsome. Nature has the strongest suggestion in everything, has she not, darling? It means more than ever to me this year. Do you feel it, too?"

A faint shiver went through me.

"I could understand it all, Hugh," I whispered. "It is in my temperament to feel those things; but the spring has always made me sad, hitherto." And I nestled closer to him. "It was at the end of March when I first saw Humphrey—Fräulein Strauss and I were having tea in the schoolroom, and my father brought him in. He seemed such a great, powerful man, towering above papa—I was afraid of him directly. You see, I was quite a child then, with my hair in a pigtail, although I would be seventeen in June. Ah! it was all horrible. And we were married just a few weeks afterward, in May, a month before my birthday; and Algernon was born in the beginning of the following March. That was fourteen years ago last week, the sixth of March. Oh! I hate to remember what the spring seemed to mean. I was so horribly ill, and so frightened. I had none of the mother's feelings I ought to have had; the whole thing was a nightmare of terror and pain. Letitia and I were not the friends we are now, in those days, and there were only Humphrey's stern, robust sisters instructing me in my duties, and making me get up too soon."

Hugh held me very tightly, and the fierce light I knew so well grew again in his dear eyes.

"How hideously cruel!" he said. "The ways of men are perfectly incredible, aren't they, darling?—And so that is all they have made you think of the spring-time! No wonder you hate it, and shrink from understanding those mysterious longing emotions toward reproduction it provokes. Ah! if you really belonged to me, how differently I would teach you to think of it, and how happy we should both be then!"

I cannot say how deeply this moved me. I could not make any reply, but Hugh understood very well.

"And to think that before I met you I, too, was growing callous and cynical about most subjects," he went on; "and if a thing pleased me, I took it with never a backward thought. You have been to me like an angel, Guinevere, gilding everything with your purity and your sweetness. People have such a strange idea of that word purity. For some it means a rigid, barren asceticism, and consists merely in the crushing out of all sex and all warmth. For me it means the realization of sweet nature in its most elevated mood, with truth and sympathy exalted and sanctified."

"Oh! my dear—and have I meant all that to you?" I asked.

"You have meant to me everything that a woman can mean to a man, Guinevere, when she is his absolute mate."

And he folded me in his arms.

. . . . . .

A new mood has come upon us in London—a more passionate one. The ridiculous music in the comic operas even excites some sense. Hugh hates to be away from me a second, and he says he feels jealous when we go out and any one chances to look at me, or the others of the party monopolize my attention. We are generally six—with Langthorpe and some nice woman for him, and a young man for Letitia.

"If you were really my wife, Guinevere, I would not be such an ass," Hugh said this morning, as we sat in the heliotrope sitting-room. "I should be only pleased, then, and proud of your success. But it is the fret of acting indifference and never being certain I am going to see you alone afterward. I feel jealous of every person and every moment which keeps you from we when we have this limited time together. How I wish we had not left Minton Dremont!"

"Alas! so do I."

"I want you to come for Easter, darling; it is the fifteenth

of April. My sister will be with me, and her children; and Algernon and Burbridge have such a high old time together. On the Easter Tuesday I have asked the same people down for the races and the ball as last year. They are only going to stay until the end of the week, but for that time, perhaps, you would rather go back to Redwood. Letitia thought it would be extremely unwise not to have them for this festivity, as they are always accustomed to come, and she suggested to me last night that you should ask old Jack Kaird and herself and Langthorpe, and any one of the Bohun tribe you can think of, to Redwood, and we should combine parties. What do you think of this plan?"

"It seems a good one," I agreed. "We must get accustomed to the exigencies and obligations of life, Hugh; we cannot be in Paradise forever, can we?—alas!"

So this was all arranged, and next week I go down alone to Redwood for a few days, to settle things for this party, and then move to Minton Dremont when Algernon returns, which happens to be the Thursday before Easter; and there we shall stay until the Tuesday morning, with Lady Morvaine, going back to Redwood to be in time to receive Letitia and Langthorpe and our four other guests.

But the joy can never be so great again as were those short weeks of perfect freedom in Hugh's home, with Letitia and Gerald Northey and my Lover and I—alone!

CHAPTER XIX

APRIL, 1906

THE last week in London was a strange one. There occurred difficulties about my seeing Hugh even with Letitia's kindest connivance. One thing after another cropped up, and it drove him nearly mad with the torment of it, so that when it was possible to be alone with him, it seemed to react upon him and produce a wild fit of passion—teaching me a new side of him. I am learning things in my own nature, too, of which I did not dream. If one loves a man with the whole of one's being of body and soul—as I love Hugh—it is impossible to make comparisons in his moods, or decide that one prefers this one or that. One accepts them all with tenderness and comprehension growing in the understanding of them as time goes on. I dare say there are some women who rule men, and, so to speak, set the pace in everything between them—but I am not one of these. Hugh leads always, though he loves me so he would invariably consider what I wished.

Last night—before I came down here to Redwood—we had an hour alone in Letitia's sitting-room, and we talked of the strange, mighty on-rolling of passion, and what a supreme master it is; and Hugh picked up our book of Rossetti's Sonnets which I had been comforting myself with before he came in, and he found the fifty-seventh one, and read it to me aloud.

"This is exactly like you, Guinevere," he said, "an absolute portrait—and what a triumph for me to know, to all others, that 'glass' will turn 'ice to the Moon.' But once or twice I have wondered, like the poet in his last two lines:

"Ah! who shall say she deems not loveliest
The hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand?"

Tell me, is it so, Guinevere?" and his deep voice had a wistful note in it, even a little anxious.

"Rossetti himself could not answer that question with certainty, dear love," I said, "so how can I? When passion is burning, it is one expression of the same thing as when tenderness is hand in hand. Neither would be complete without the other to contrast it with at times. If we had only passion—it would destroy our love with flame, and if we had only tenderness it would make it faint. It is because the balance is equal that we are happy—do not let us question about it."

But Hugh's eyes still looked wistful.

"I thought—lately—that perhaps my passion was growing—growing so that it might weary you. Tell me—I am restless—Guinevere."

"You could never weary me, Hugh, whatever you expressed. Turn those pages back to sonnet fifteen, and you will see what we are, just as you told me in Richmond Park—the proof of what the old Brahmin said to you."

He found the place and read. Then he looked comforted.

"It is the gall of things," he said. "When I am with you once more in tranquillity at Minton Dremont, I shall be as I was before, darling."

But however he is, I adore him!—so of what use to speculate?

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It seems strange to be at Redwood Moat alone; but it is quiet, and I can think of my Beloved. It is the first time since we met on the eleventh of February, until I came here on the ninth of April, that we have not seen each other every day. I feel very solitary, but not jarred as I would be were others present; and I sit up alone in my turret room in the evening and dream—exquisite dreams of remembrance! I go over every single incident from our first meeting, and recall all my own emotions and the expression of his. I picture Hugh as he appeared this time last year, when I first met him—and I love to remember the change in him there is now. I have only two more days by myself; then Algernon comes and we move to Minton Dremont. I do not care in the least if this is unconventional or not—Algernon will be perfectly enchanted, and so shall I. But sweet as Lady Morvaine is, she is not Letitia, and a great deal more ceremony must be kept up. There can be no more sitting in Hugh's sitting-room alone with him in the evenings after dinner, when the coffee has come. Though he says we can

be together in the late afternoons—and his sister never comes into his wing. My room, which I am going back to, has its real approach from the gallery and the great staircase; but we never used that way, as we were so cozy, we four—Letitia and Gerald Northey and my lover and I—with just the morning-room for our drawing-room, and the breakfast-room for our dining-room—close together next Hugh's wing.

Just now, as I sat here in front of the fire an owl flew round the turret and made its peculiar, weird cry. And a sudden, horrible, unaccountable fear came over me—fear of I could not say what, nor why I should feel it. And, agitated, my thoughts would rush forward to the recollection of the return of Humphrey about the fifth of June. Mercifully, he will not be here for my birthday, which is on the fourth, and Hugh is coming with me to Eton to see Algernon. Lady Morvaine will be there also, seeing her son. And next day will be the end of joy.

I used the whole of my will to banish this remembrance. I resolutely made myself think of only pleasant things, but it would return—and every time the owl's melancholy hoot was heard, fresh disquiet came to me.

Suddenly voices seemed to whisper, "Live while you can, poor fool; the prison walls will close again," and it seemed that just from under the west window there came a pitiful groan, and then a fiendish laugh. I was so horribly startled, I bounded to my feet, and there sat Petrov, whom I had brought over from Minton Dremont to-day, with his eyes one black pupil, and his short velvet fur bristled on his back, standing before the bedroom door in an attitude of terrified defence.

What could it mean? I was sick with a nameless dread. What did Petrov see? Then I got out Hugh's photographs —one of our snapshots done of us together looking so happy and gay—and another, a cabinet-sized one of just his head, with his dear eyes gazing out straight into mine—and their message of love comforted me, and brought back my nerve and calm, and I turned and said aloud: "Whatever and whoever you are, begone! I am protected by God and true love," and after that the owl's worst cries had no more effect upon me, and Petrov came back and purred on my knee. But it is hateful to think that this must be my home for the rest of my life. I must be strong and rise superior to environment. Hugh's love must surround me always.

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The first thing Algernon exclaimed when he saw me on

the station platform was: "Oh! mum, how well you look. You have never been so jolly strong, and not pasty!" And this unconscious tribute to the result that happiness has brought to me pleased me. Algernon himself, whom I had not seen since he went to Eton in the autumn half, except when he came up to wish his father farewell, is enormously grown; he is so aggressive and noisy. He was quite glad to see me, and tall for fourteen, as tall as I am, and wonderfully handsome, and he has acquired that delightful air of a man of the world! I remember Bob had it; I expect Eton gives it. His manners have improved, too, and are less offensive and daring. He was glad to be back, and asked every question about the horses and about the cleaning of the moat—which he would so have enjoyed.

"Fancy their finding that jolly old skeleton," he said. "What fun! I expect it was the Cavalier—served him right, lurking round the Bohuns' house—but I wish he had been a Roundhead, don't you, mum? I like the Cavaliers best; Roundheads were probably mostly cads. Father is ashamed of that turn of the family, though he says that is what has kept us owning a shilling now!"

He could hardly wait until we arrived in the courtyard in his eagerness to rush to the stables, where I left him with the stud groom in a seventh heaven of delight to see the horses, and Snack and Pip, and hear of all their doings.

I had not written to inform him we were going at tea-time to Minton Dremont, so when he came presently bounding up the turret stairs to my shrine I had this piece of good news for him.

To be with Burbridge, who is two years older than himself, and growing into a "swell" at Eton, was a pure joy!

Petrov remembered my son, it would seem, for I heard a faint hiss from under the table. And Algernon exclaimed disgustedly:

"You've still got that horrid beast, mother! I hoped he'd been caught in a trap before now."

I did not answer him; there was no use. I only told him to go and get ready to start.

"What a mercy father is away, isn't it?" he said, as he went off through my room. "He'd never have consented to turn out of this dungeon to go and have some fun at Minton Dremont with Sir Hugh. I wish he'd stay away for all the summer holidays, too, don't you?"

Algernon is like the east wind—a great wonderful thing, shaking the trees and tossing the waves while the sky is

cloudless, icy blue, and the sun glares, but hardly warms. He is a strong, magnificent animal creature, but if he has any soul I have not yet seen peeps of it.

I felt rasped—I can explain it in no other way; he and his father always make me feel as though I had been out in the east wind, and I was horribly conscious of it now.

With this element in our party, it did not seem there would be so much sweet quiet at Minton Dremont as there had been.

Lady Morvaine greeted us most kindly, and we had tea in the saloon, with the three young people down for this first day.

"To-morrow, they will be much happier all together in the old schoolroom," Lady Morvaine said, "and Mrs. Howitt (the housekeeper) to pour out for them; my two have known her since they were born, and she spoils them terribly."

I understand Hugh so well now I can read his every expression and generally fathom his thoughts, and I could see that he was using control to be friendly and casual. His eyes had blazed with joy when he came in and found us there, and I knew he was restive until the moment should come when he and I could be alone again. Lady Morvaine took me up to my room after tea, in her kind, gentle way, and remained talking some time, and there left me, saying I might wish to rest or write letters until dinner; and ten minutes afterward I was softly going down the stairs which lead to Hugh's sitting-room, where I found him standing in rigid impatience by the fireplace.

Oh! the joy to be once more in his arms!

"How unspeakable these days have been, Guinevere!" he said presently, when we sat upon the sofa. "One long ache—and now the restrictions! I am irritated even with Adelaide, who is one of the best souls in the world!"

"We are perfect geese, Hugh. I believe we should like to be on a desert isle, all alone."

"No; but we should like to be married and human, and always together naturally, as we ought to be, darling, that is all," and he stroked my hair.

It was some little while before I could get him to be soothed and tranquil and happy as we used to be in this room; but by the time I went to dress for dinner, all the atmosphere was sweetness again.

"Darling," he said, linking his arm in mine in dear, possessive familiarity, as we walked toward the door, "we have got to go round and look at every one of our plantings and

arrangings to-morrow morning. We have been away from them for over a month, and must see how they are getting on."

Ah, me! I am indeed content and at home in the house of my Beloved!

The swift days pass; one settles down to changes if they are not altogether distasteful, and we are now accustomed to the extra strain of necessary manœuvrings to be alone that the absence of Letitia and the presence of others enforce, and we contrive not to be separated for long at a time. It is even an excitement, I think, and causes an extra fillip to joy when we know we have a clear hour in front of us. Hugh, however, is not of this opinion, and I often see impatience on his face. He has ordered and ruled everything to his will always, and cannot stand the slightest check. To-morrow—Tuesday—Algernon and I go back to Redwood Moat again, alas! and Hugh's party come. He is fuming at this more as each day goes by. But in spite of these things we have been divinely happy.

This afternoon, while Lady Morvaine and I were alone—Hugh being out riding with the children just before tea—she talked to me in a strain she had not done before. She is a gentle, reserved woman, but I believe is very attached to me. I do not think she has the slightest idea her brother loves me so much—but I am not absolutely sure. If I could be, it would settle a matter in my mind.

"We are all so very fond of this place," she began by saying. "My younger sister, Lily Forester, whom you have not met yet, I think, and Hugh and I; we have always loved it much better than Brasdale, the northern property. The house there was burnt down when we were children, and, in any case, the smoke of the town is growing too near, it has spread so. We all do wish Hugh would marry; it is a thousand pities, isn't it, that he does not?"

I said yes, that it was, as well as I could, and she went on: "Victor Dremont and his children are the most hopeless people; every time we remember that it must all go to them if Hugh does not have a son, it hurts. You can feel for us, I am sure, with your own splendid boy, dear Mrs. Bohun."

I tried to look sympathetic, but I really could not speak—it scorched me, in to my soul. She continued in this way, lamenting and recounting to me family histories until I felt icy cold. It touched me, her pride in this place and her ancestors and her brother—and I stood between her wishes and

their accomplishment. The thought brought intense pain.

Presently the rosy outdoor party of four burst into the room—we were in the saloon—the boys glowing with health and vigorous life, and Hugh looking almost one of them, so strong and splendid is he. And little Lady Adela, charming tomboy that she is, with cherry lips and flaming cheeks, seated herself upon a low stool and put her head against my knee.

"Did you ever see such a contrast as Mrs. Bohun is to Adela?" Lord Burbridge said. "You look so awfully pale," he went on, turning to me. "I do wish you had been out with us on Jenny Wren in this jolly wind."

Hugh's eyes were fixed upon me with troubled, questioning anxiety, and I dared not meet his glance.

I made myself talk at tea, when the children left us, and Lady Morvaine, on the plea of writing letters, soon quitted the room.

"What is it, darling?" Hugh asked anxiously, when we were alone. "Your little face is a white rose again, as it used to be."

"Nothing," I said, "Hugh," and I tried to laugh and be ordinary; but he was not to be deceived.

"Come and sit in my room," he commanded. "I am miserable enough on this our last day."

So we went through the morning-room and the antechamber and came to his sitting-room.

"Now tell me all about it—every single thing, Guinevere," he ordered fondly, pushing me into a big chair and kneeling down beside me. "Something has happened to trouble my sweetheart, and she has to be comforted and petted, and made to confess." But I could not tell him, and tried to divert his thoughts, but without success; and at last he grew horribly worried and impatient.

"It is something Adelaide has said to you, I am certain of it. Guinevere, darling, for God's sake do not keep me thus in suspense."

"Hugh, I tell you, it is only your imagination," I protested. "I am just the same; we spoke of your northern property, and how the smoke was coming too near from the town—and, oh! heaps of everyday things."

"And Adelaide said it was a frightful pity I did not marry. Now I know what it is!" and he laughed shortly. "I wish to goodness my family would leave me alone. I am my own master, surely, and can do what I please. Guinevere, confess immediately—that is what upset you, and made this

darling little face so white. Well, I shall kiss it as a punishment until it looks like Adela's. Darling, sweet goosie! Do you think such ideas ever enter my head?"

"No, Hugh," I told him, "I am sure they do not; but that does not prevent the facts from hitting one—and I love you so, I cannot help thinking of all aspects that might be for your good."

His face, from expressing fondest love, grew stern.

"No woman shall judge for me," he said. "I will decide these things of what is best for me, myself. You belong to me and I belong to you, and the bond shall never be broken by me—you had better realize that."

Tears sprang to my eyes at the harshness of his voice, though the words comforted me; and when he saw this, he bent forward and clasped me in his arms and rained caresses upon me and tender words of love. So that at last I was comforted and peace was restored.

I must banish these thoughts, as I have banished the one of Humphrey's return. But as I went up to dress it seemed the same voices as at Redwood Moat whispered to me on the stairs:

"Live, poor fool, while you can—the prison walls will close again," and I shivered with cold.

When I entered the bright chintz flowered room I shook myself and realized it was all imagination, and I did not permit any shadows to spoil the perfect union and happiness of this our last evening at Minton Dremont.

CHAPTER XX

Lady Morvaine also left Minton Dremont to-day—at the same time that we did—and she has asked Algernon to go and spend the rest of his holidays with them up in Cheshire when our races here will be over, at the end of the week. I am so glad of this, as it will be such a great pleasure to him. I had been wondering what I ought to do with him. Letitia had asked us to go and stay with her, but Algernon did not look forward to that. Now I can go alone, knowing he will be only about twenty miles off, in safe and agreeable company. I have had two brief letters from Humphrey, filled with himself and his doings. I have written to him dutifully every fortnight. It is a good thing the moat has been cleared out, he said in his last epistle, and it was "deuced kind" of Hugh Dremont to put up Letitia and me. He supposed he had had a party for us. Letitia had written to him, telling him her view of the whole thing, and with her inimitable tact and knowledge of manipulating affairs, she had made him accept everything without being irritated, as I feared he would be. I had not said one word to deceive him, and yet, as I read his letter just now, a sense of discomfort came upon me. I absolutely loathe having to dissimulate in any way. This is something else I must banish from my thoughts, though. Ah! me.

My party arrived this afternoon, and I have told dear old Sir John Kaird he must take Humphrey's place and act host for me with Algernon.

Letitia is in high spirits. She did not motor, for a wonder, but came down in the train with a number of the guests going on to Minton Dremont, and she is full of their ways and doings.

"Winnie" is still determined to secure Hugh, and one or two of the others have also put forward claims for the post of favorite. A shuffling season has taken place, it would

seem, since last year, and several of them are on the look-out for new partners to amuse themselves with! Letitia caught sight of my face as she recounted to me all this in her room before dressing for dinner, and she went into a fit of laughter.

"Yes, it is comic, isn't it, Guinevere?" she said. "I never had really looked at us all from a detached point of view until I was awakened by your and Hugh's affections for each other. Now it all seems frightfully funny. I wonder if they will appear different to Hugh, also. It will be so amusing to watch. His temperament is too impatient of control to stand anything he does not like."

"Yes," I responded. "I do not feel very disturbed about them."

Letitia laughed again softly.

"No, you need not be. I believe, in reality, you are cleverer than any of them, in spite of your simplicity—and you have got quite good-looking, you know, lately; full of life, and so much less pale. Langthorpe was only saying so just now; and if he notices the change, it must be striking!" Then——

"Is not it a joy," she called, as I was leaving the room, "to feel we need not mind a bit, even if we are five minutes late for dinner!"

How I should hate to know that every one was rejoicing at my absence, as they are because Humphrey is away—even Hartington is vastly relieved, and has conducted the arrangements for this little party in the most admirable manner.

I felt quite gay at dinner. I had some kind of satisfaction in my new-found sense of dignity and importance—with the knowledge that no one would snub me, or frown at me. I only wished Hugh were here to see me in my new guise of a freewoman.

The four guests besides Letitia, Langthorpe, and Sir John are quite nice, harmless people: one couple Bohun cousins, and the other, old friends; and no one would have recognized Redwood Moat to-night, with its light-hearted atmosphere. Algernon has enjoyed himself immensely, he told me—as he kissed me good night.

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The week has gone by, and it has developed yet another fresh stage between Hugh and me. When we met at the races, I could see he was ruffled about something—there was a steely light in his blue eyes.

It was impossible to have any private conversation with him, and although he seemed to be doing his duty in the same way as he did it last year, it was unwillingly. The day was cold, too, with a hateful wind, and no one appeared to be enjoying it except my son. Races to him are unalloyed happiness in any weather.

Our whole party was to dine at Minton Dremont in the evening, and just before we began to dress for it, Letitia came to my turret room.

"How cross Hugh looks; doesn't he?" she remarked, as she pushed the logs together. "I gathered from Ermyntrude that they had all chaffed him after dinner last night because, I suppose, he let out some sentiment that we have heard him exploit lately, Guinevere, but which none of them have ever known to proceed from him—and he grew nettled, and answered them sharply, and Ada made one of her exquisitely cynical remarks. How frightfully mad they would all be if they knew it is your influence which has caused him to measure them with a new measure!"

It is such a strange feeling to meet one who is nearer and dearer than any other on earth in company, where the most casual aloof behavior is required! It gives a sense of absolute unreality. I could not get over the feeling that I was acting in a dream, and should wake and find myself alone with Hugh, in perfect intimacy, in his sitting-room. I could see he found it almost impossible to keep up his rôle.

We did not dance after dinner, but just sat about in the saloon, so there was no chance to talk beyond a few words.

"This is simply sickening! I shall come over in the morning and ask for Letitia," Hugh announced, as he passed me once.

Then he had to go and talk to some one else before I could answer.

I was almost glad when we left—the strain was growing too great.

Next morning, soon after ten, Cæsar and his master pranced into the courtyard. We had all only just finished breakfast, and were about in the hall. Letitia had not yet appeared.

Hartington came forward and whispered that Sir Hugh Dremont was outside, and had not dismounted, but was asking how soon he could see Lady Langthorpe, so I sent a message to tell him to come in and wait until she came down. Which he knew very well would not be for another hour. I told Hartington to show him into the drawing-room, and then soon I got rid of my guests and joined him.

He was like a horse champing his bit with impatience, and his eyes were full of passionate love.

"I've simply bolted, darling. Got off before any of them were down. I could not bear it another second," he said. "They are boring me to death. I seem to know beforehand exactly what they are all going to say, and when Ada will be brilliant, and Winnie caressing, and Ermyntrude vague. They all seem perfectly artificial, and yet I suppose they are exactly as they were before. It is I myself who have altered. Guinevere—tell me: you could not stand another day like yesterday, either, darling?" and he stroked my hand fondly. "It was ten times worse than London. There we always used to have at least some hours together in the twenty-four, but at the races and dinner it was one long chafe—with no prospect of relief."

"Hugh, we must control ourselves," I told him. "Think!—if we fret at one day like this, how are we ever going to get through the weeks which are coming?"

"As soon as this infernal party goes," he informed me, "I intend to motor up to Cheshire to stay with Langthorpe and Letitia, and I understand my Guinevere is going there, too—and when she leaves——"

"She will have to come back here. It will be May then, and there will be no excuse to stay away."

"Very well. I shall return also to Minton Dremont, and I will have William down, whom I can really trust; and you can come for canters in Corlston Chase, and into the park, and William can keep Jenny Wren in the copse nearest to my yew hedge garden; and often we could spend a happy afternoon together in my sitting-room without a soul's knowing. There are all sorts of beautiful corners in the park, too, which I have not shown you yet, darling. May at least shall be for our happiness—leave it to me."

The idea of this comforted us, I think, a little, and enabled us both to get through our duties. The Minton Dremont party dined here at Redwood that night, and I got some pleasure out of showing Hugh how well I can play hostess when not suppressed and ignored by my husband.

But the light in his dear blue eyes was still full of unrest and passion, and Letitia said to me, when they had all gone, that it would be perfectly impossible to keep his affection for me hidden much longer, if he was unable to hide his feelings more effectually.

"It is always the same," she exclaimed. "No matter how watchful the *deus ex machina* is, one of the actors always

gives the thing away. Now, for Heaven's sake, Guinevere, be like ice to-morrow night at the Hunt ball!"

I tried to be, with the result that Hugh was angry and reproachful when we did sit out a dance together. He would not listen to reason, and, I saw, was jealous of even dear old Sir John.

These are phases which love has to go through, I suppose, when it is as great as ours, and separation makes life a torment.

I am sitting alone in the gray dawn in the turret chamber now, and I cannot keep my thoughts from rushing ahead. In seven weeks Humphrey will have returned—when all meetings will be impossible. Alas! and alas! what will happen then?

Oh! Spring, with your passionate youth, your rising sap, your message of fulfilment to the earth, take pity on two poor lovers, who may only sip at the cup of joy.

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It is the first of May, and the visit to Letitia at her Cheshire home has been all happiness. Very nearly as perfect as our first days at Minton Dremont. And Hugh, freed from chaffing at barriers, has resumed his dear tenderness and comradeship with me. Langthorpe and Letitia do not bother us in the least, and we ride and walk and motor about undisturbed. Sometimes we go over to see Algernon at Lady Morvaine's, and Hugh has stayed there for a couple of nights, to make everything look natural; and to-morrow Algernon and Burbridge go back to Eton, and Hugh and I return to our respective homes.

But underneath in me there is growing a strange excitement, as though voices were saying always the same thing: "Live, live, poor fool, while you may." I cannot with all my will sometimes annihilate the remembrance that the days are flying, and soon there must come the end, when the prison door will close again.

Hugh has arranged everything for our meetings when we go back—he to Minton Dremont, and I to Redwood—and we have all the lovely month of May before us. I will try not to look ahead.

The hours fly—either in unutterable happiness with my Beloved under the greenwood tree, or creeping up the yew-surrounded garden through the private door to his sitting-room; or they lag, and burn and pass in feverish impatience, waiting here at Redwood Moat until the morrow comes and again we can be together. It all has to be done with such

caution and skill. But I think fate has been kind to us, and only old William has any idea of the hours his master and I spend alone in each other's company.

Twice, upon one plea and another, Hugh has been able to come and call upon me openly, and I have played to him in the drawing-room, and we are growing more intimate in soul every day. It seems that we neither of us really live when apart. Passion and tenderness and all shades of emotion seem to be augmenting. Hugh has strange turns in his character. I get glimpses of them, and I know they are the aspects which people like Mrs. Dalison were able to appeal to. Now that the unrest caused by the restrictions of others' presence has been removed, he is always happy, though, and sometimes so gay, like a boy, and sometimes, again, amusing and cynical. We cannot have many books out in the May sunshine, but we talk and never seem to tire of each other's conversation.

"You see, you have the delightful stored reflections of long years of silence and loneliness to impart to me, precious child," Hugh said yesterday, as we sat on the bench old William has constructed for us in the copse. "And all the wisdom and trained critical faculties which you show me are a constant surprise and joy. Fancy what it would have been like if we had grown up together and learned all these things hand-in-hand!"

"It could not have been more perfect than it is, Hugh," I assured him. "I do not think there can be two people on earth who are so absolutely one in everything, of thought, point of view and desire, as we are—do you?"

"No; we never have a single jar; and if we were to live together for a hundred years it would always be the same. That is the agony of it—that soon—" And then he stopped abruptly, and covered his eyes with his hand.

I did not tell him that he must not look ahead, or anything like that; the time is getting too near to Humphrey's return for us to be able to prevent his shadow from falling upon us at moments. But Hugh always speaks as if our blissful union were going on forever—he will talk of things of years to come, and say how we shall plant this shrub here or there in the garden, which, when it has grown, will make such and such an effect to please me. He consults me about everything, and talks of all his belongings as ours, in a way that Humphrey has never done. I do not think, if we were really married, he could be any different.

One of his greatest pleasures is to lie with his dear head in

my lap and to get me to stroke and caress his hair. And he always tells me stories of his mother then. She died only about eleven years ago, and he loved her dearly. He is not going to have any Whitsuntide party this summer, because Whitsunday falls upon the third of June, and my birthday is on the fourth, and we are going to spend it at Eton with Algernon. Letitia starts for Paris on the Saturday, and I am to go up to Norfolk Street on the Wednesday and stay on alone after she leaves, so as to meet Humphrey. I have given Parton a holiday for that week, and Hugh and I shall, no doubt, spend perfectly happy hours together, for the whole of that interested set of his friends will be away.

On the days when it has rained and I have not been able to make any excuse to go out, I have sat up here in my turret chamber and dreamed. And if it were not for the shortness of our time still to be together, I could be quite happy—but anything that keeps us apart now causes us both anguish.

Humphrey arrives at Southampton on Tuesday the fifth of June, and will be in London at four o'clock in the afternoon. Algernon and I are to meet him at the station. And for a week after Hugh is going off to Letitia in Paris.

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To-morrow is our last day here. Oh! how I pray that it may keep fine! I am going up to Minton Dremont openly in the morning "to see the gardens." Hugh rode down and asked me yesterday before Hartington. And then I am to stay to lunch with the parson and his wife; and when they go I am to pretend I am walking back across the park, but in loved's sitting-room. Oh! I cannot bear to think that the end has nearly come.

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There is a thunderstorm rolling up. How I hate it!—And those voices that once before seemed to whisper are near me to-night. I am sure this place is haunted, and that in certain states of the atmosphere those poor, unquiet spirits can make themselves felt and heard.

Oh! what are the days going to be like that hold no chance of comfort? When Humphrey's rasping voice giving me orders and recounting to me his success and adventures is all that I shall hear! Petrov, come and nestle up to the neck of your poor mistress and warm her. For, even though the air is stifling, she is shivering with cold.

CHAPTER XXI

A PERFECTLY golden sun dawned for our last day together at Minton Dremont. When I looked out of the east window and saw the glorious rays above Hugh's flag, my spirit expanded with gladness. It seemed to me an omen of happiness after the storm in the night, an omen that meant that some day the sun would rise permanently upon our lives and melt the remembrance of thunder and lightning and weeping rain.

Hugh was waiting for me at the gate which leads to the gardens from the avenue, and I got out of the brougham and went with him there. All the planting we arranged in February seems to be doing well, and it was a joy to walk with my Beloved and examine them all. He took extra pains, it would seem, not by the faintest word to suggest that this was our last day; we might have been a pair of married lovers returning to our home, eager to see how things had grown in our absence. Every minute incident and aspect of things is indelibly graven upon my memory. I can shut my eyes now and see the tones in the sky, the fresh exquisite green of the trees—the flowers and the great lilac bushes; I can feel the warmth of the sun and hear the happy birds chirping their love-songs.

"Heart of me," Hugh said. "You have gilded and sanctified my garden and my house, and nothing shall ever be altered in it except as you may wish. It is now *our* garden, Guinevere."

An infinite tenderness was between us, and we were silent as we went through the wrought-iron gate into the yew-surrounded lawn. Here we sat down upon the marble bench in the arbor which looks out over the park.

Then Hugh went back to the house and brought out some of our pet books, and among them the "Sonnets of Proteus"—he had not read any of them before to me, and he found

some which pleased us both, but he would not read those which were cynical and showed how the love of the two passed away.

"They had not found the secret, Guinevere," he said, "and they were not really together a whole soul, as we are. Fate might part our bodies for a time, but nothing can ever sever our souls, sweetheart, in this world or the next."

The morning passed away thus in perfect happiness, and then we went in to lunch with the old parson and his wife. Of the afternoon I cannot write, it is too sacred in its deep meaning to us both; and as the evening shadows began to fall Hugh walked with me back through the park. There seemed an exaltation in us that was not of earth, we spoke hardly at all; he came with me into the courtyard at Redwood Moat, and into the garden, and then through the turret door and up to my shrine, and there we said a last good-bye, both our eyes swimming with tears; we were beyond the acting that all was as it would ever be. The pitiful truth had forced itself into prominence. To-day had been the last day of perfect gladness and freedom we could hope for at Minton Dremont, and ahead of us, after the few days in London, yawned an abyss of difficulty with Humphrey standing guard.

"God keep you, my soul," Hugh whispered in anguish, and, turning, went toward the door; but we could not bear it, and rushed once more into each other's arms.

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Ah, me! these days in London have been good—more passionate as they always are than those at Minton Dremont, but tender and sweet as well. We have spent long hours in Kensington Gardens, and we have revisited our original picnic's haunt in Richmond Park, and laughed together at the memory of that first day, and my fears. I have no fear now ever when I am with my Beloved, his care of me never slackens or sleeps.

And to-morrow we motor down to Eton to spend my birthday there and see all the festivities of the Fourth of June.

Letitia left for Paris yesterday with last counsels to me about Humphrey.

"Remember, Guinevere," she said. "You must curb that foolishness in you which may make you feel a discomfort with him. You have done nothing that *you yourself* think wrong under the circumstances. If you feel anything, it will be only the current of convention still affecting you, and which you had better get rid of; recollect that we

thrashed out the point of right and wrong in the beginning, and you came to your conclusions—now have the courage to remain firm in them."

"Yes," I returned, "I realize all that. I have not the slightest regret or sense of anything but glory and joy in having Hugh for my lover; there is only the feeling that I loathe all pretence, I cannot say that I will not have odious moments if I have to dissimulate."

"Well, try not to be too serious," my sister pleaded, "you have another point to console yourself with. Humphrey does not trust you blindly, or rely upon your honor; he does not trust you at all, in fact—he could not trust any one, that is why he is always being deceived and tricked by the servants and Algernon and every one he has to do with; he draws that upon himself by his attitude. He left you alone—not because he trusted you, but because he thinks you are such a poor creature you would get no chance of amusing yourself. He suspects every one all the time of the lowest intentions. It is only by that extraordinary blindness which seems to descend upon all jealous husbands when there is really cause for their fears, that he has not suspected Hugh."

"I will try to be sensible," I promised.

"Try also to be less timid and quiet; talk to him at meals, and be bright and gay as you are now with us all. It will make things easier for you. To see you together, it is as if it were a terrified child with a cross uncle."

Then she laughed and kissed me; but at the last moment when she was leaving, she came back and whispered to me while she looked straight into my eyes:

"Guinevere, tell me, dearest, have I made up to you for having helped to build your prison-house? Last year when I first stayed at Redwood and it struck me for the first time that I had done that, I felt perfectly sick, and I determined then to help you to live and be happy if I could."

And, though I am naturally undemonstrative, I threw my arms round Letitia's neck and hugged her. For, indeed, she has wiped out all old debts.

We spent Whitsunday in London—my lover and I—and it rained; but Hugh had arranged everything so that we could be together for the entire day in safety, and the weather did not matter. We were divinely happy; a feverish passionate joy fills every instant of the time—knowing its hideously short duration.

And now as I look out upon the starlit sky just lightening with the approach of dawn, I realize that indeed the very last

day has come, and when it is over a new existence must begin.

Oh, God! let the great laws which You made, and not those which man made, work out in the end for our happiness.

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I had never been at Eton since I was a child; I came once when Bob was first there, and then I was too young to feel the wonder and the glory of it. But each aspect of it came upon my understanding to-day with renewed interest. To see those quaint old buildings and to feel their atmosphere of eternal youth and glorious aims, the very air saturated with young enthusiasm and generosity, and belief in the future. The grace of a chivalry long passed away from other places still clings to Eton—an innate conservatism—a realization of the value of character, an abiding by an unwritten law made for the elevation of all courtly and knightly things. Who, to see the flower of young England on this their school's festival, brimming over with life and pride and strength, could fail to experience a deep emotion? It is the fashion in these days to abuse all authors who depict the ways of the upper classes, and call them snobs and tuft-hunters; ridicule is cast on them by the critics with a bitter underneath venom. I wonder why this is, and why those who write of this class should arouse antagonism more than people like Jacobs who write stories of bargemen? Surely both are interesting as human studies, and it is just according to one's taste which interests one the most. It always seems to me that the upper classes are more agreeable than the middle, not in the least because of actual virtues, but because for hundreds of years they have had the advantage of time to polish all the graces and refinements of life. Leisure to think and acquire knowledge of beauty and chivalrous points of view, leisure for their bodies to be exercised into finer shapes. The whole thing is the obvious result of cause and effect, and it seems so silly when funny, angry Radicals try to deny all this and thunder that all men are the same and equal, a ridiculous contradiction to every scientific investigation; as well say that the carthorse is the same as the racehorse. Both are good, but yet are quite different. They should go to Eton on the Fourth of June and see those thousand and more of England's youthful *gentlemen* and get in touch with their points of view. Their dear, straight honesty, their chivalry, their sense of what is and what is not "cricket." And this spirit I expect is in all the great public schools, but I only know Eton because of Bob and Algernon.

In after life many of the boys may fall, for each individual is not given strength of purpose, but at least they have had a glorious chance. For me it seems far more wicked and awful when gentlepeople do low and mean things than when any other class commits them. If they have had the good fortune to come of a stock who have for genrations received from God all the material advantages, how much greater then should be their obligation to deserve them. Hugh once said when we were discussing this point that when a gentleman falls, he falls into the gutter and not into the middle classes. Because in the higher grades they are natural with a polished naturalness, at ease among all things; and in the gutter they are natural with a brutal naturalness which is indifferent, so they are more akin; but in the middle-classes they are full of hypocrisies and shams and conventions because—another of Hugh's aphorisms!—"the bourgeois is not sure of himself; he requires laws, written and unwritten." I think Eton affected me so, that is why I am putting down all these opinions so minutely, like a tiresome student of evolution.

Hugh and I left the motor at the White Hart at Windsor and walked down and over the bridge to the wall, where such generations of darlings have sat and kicked their legs! And thereby was an animated crowd of parents and little sisters, with nice pale-blue sashes and such proud, happy faces, and big sisters, and friends, and old Etonians, all arriving and being welcomed by the boys, dressed in their best clothes.

Algernon was among them, groomed to the last stage of perfection! his tall hat shining in the sun, pushed at the back of his head, and an immaculate umbrella and buttonhole. I have not this worry with him which some mothers have with their sons. He is extremely particular about his clothes and his personal appearance, and Humphrey has always encouraged him in these points. I felt a glow of satisfaction when I caught sight of him; he is certainly a most beautiful creature, with his bloomingly healthy face, flashing gray eyes, and brown curly hair. Although only fourteen, he is very tall, and next half will go into tails. He enjoys the proud position of fag to "Silchester," who is captain of the Eleven, and whom Algernon looks upon as the greatest living hero on earth. He—Algernon—is no mean cricketer himself, and only last week wrote to say that he had made a score of twenty-five for the Lower Boy Eleven of his house in "Sixpenny"—the cricket-field where the Lower Boys play.

He was extremely glad to see us, and introduced several

of his comrades, and we all went off to hear Absence called in School Yard, where Hugh came across numbers of his old friends, who, like himself, had come down to see some young member of their families. Here we met Lady Morvaine, and Adela and Burbridge, the whole party to be entertained by Hugh later at luncheon at the White Hart.

"It's all rot, mother, going to hear the speeches," Algernon said. "You can do that another year. I want to show you my room now, and you would like to see the Chapel again, I expect, and the swishing-block. I only just escaped it the week before last!"

Hugh and I allowed ourselves to be taken wherever my son wished, and he and Algernon talked together as two chums of the same age, Algernon appealing to Hugh every now and then to help him out in enlightening my pretended shocking ignorance.

We enjoyed ourselves so! and duly admired the sporting prints on the wall of his tiny room, and the *Vanity Fair* caricature of the Headmaster pinned above the mantelpiece. Then we strolled to the Chapel and inspected that, and to the Library, and Hugh told us tales of his adventures and scrapes when he was here twenty years ago.

"It's jolly different now," Algernon said; "fellows don't get swished once in a half, if at all, thank goodness."

As we came out into the yard again we were joined by the rest of the party, and all together strolled back to the White Hart, Algernon pointing out all the "swells" we passed. He longs to be a "swell" and be able to wear a stand-up collar and link arms and swagger down the street to "Pop"! The exquisite arrogance of them! Hugh said when he was a "swell" he felt himself of far more importance than he has ever done at any other period of his life.

We passed "Silchester," who scrutinized us covertly, and all stopping to look in at the sock-shop, he whispered to Algernon, who then seemed bursting with pride, until he had blurted out:

"I say, mum! Here *is* one for you! Silchester—the Captain of the Eleven, you know—" (as though I could for a moment forget such a thing as that!) "my fagmaster—has just asked me who that pretty girl is among my people, and he would not believe me when I said it was my mother! You know you do look jolly decent to-day, doesn't she, Sir Hugh?"

No woman could desire greater incense to her vanity than this!

Algernon always shows off to advantage on public occa-

sions. I feel very proud of him, and oh! how I would love him always if he would let me. Hugh tells me he hears through his nephew Burbridge that they mean to "kick him into shape," so as time goes on he may grow near to me in all ways.

What a luncheon we ate, of young ducks and green peas and strawberries and cream! And after it went back to Eton and to the playing fields to watch the cricket—Algernon and Burbridge in frenzied excitement not to miss a stroke of the game. And after a little Hugh and I strolled away out of the happy, merry throng, beyond the old elms toward the river with its beautiful view crowned by Windsor's noble castle in the distance

Something about the whole day had stirred and moved us both.

"What an immense influence this place and this life must have on all these boys' after lives," I said. "It hardly seems possible that with such memories any of them can ever sink to anything low; it is a glorious heritage for the nation, this old Eton, isn't it, Hugh?"

"Yes, it does twine itself about the heart-strings," he answered. "You never hear any fellow who has been here wishing he had been at any other school—we are all ready to shout 'Floreat Etonia!' forever," and then he was silent as we turned and caught sight of the excited, happy crowd; and when he spoke his voice was deep with a wistful note in it.

"Guinevere, what should we be feeling like to-day, darling, if Algernon were my son as well as yours?"

"Ah, Hugh!" I cried, "then we should have nothing left to wish for in life. And if he were your son, dear lover, he would be as beautiful as he is now, bodily, and with a loving and tender soul as well, and how I would adore him, and how proud we should be!"

"Yes, I often think of it," sighed Hugh, and he looked away straight in front of him, and a mist gathered in his eyes.

And oh! the pain of another thought would come to me again. While Hugh remains my faithful lover he can never have a son—a legitimate son—to inherit his name and his lands. He saw the anguish in my face, and instantly divined my thoughts.

"Guinevere, my precious darling," he pleaded passionately, "do you think it really matters to me—not one atom in comparison to the joy of your love. It only comes to me sometimes, because it is the fulfilment of everything between two

people like you and me who are really mates. I never dream of a son in the abstract—only of one that should be yours and mine. Sweetheart, what could a child mean to me of any other woman?—the idea is loathsome."

"Oh, Hugh!" I said brokenly, "this is the price we pay for our love, because we break the law of man; we must suffer these anguishes and divert nature and turn the fulfilment of highest meaning aside. It is all like a scar that we must not look at—the skeleton in our cupboard—the worm in the bud. Oh! how I pray that I can make up to you for it in some measure. But on days like to-day it seems as though I must cry aloud with the pain."

He soothed and comforted me with gentlest tenderness, telling me over and over again that I was more precious to him than anything else in the world; and he wanted nothing further. And by the time we had to stroll back to join Algernon and go to tea in his room, an outward tranquillity had returned to me, at all events.

But all through the merry meal and our walk to see the procession of the boats from the Brocas field, and then our dinner at the White Hart and during the fireworks after it, a weight of sorrow, heavy as lead, oppressed my spirit.

It was not until Hugh and I were quite alone that his passionate devotion could make me forget all else but the glory of his love. We stayed at Windsor so that I could take Algernon back to meet his father in London the next day.

And very early in the morning my lover and I said our last farewell with eyes streaming with tears, and Hugh motored off before the world was half awake.

And now I am at Norfolk Street again, and Algernon is drumming upon the window pane—waiting until Letitia's electric brougham shall come round to take us to the station. And in an hour's time I shall have received the frosty kiss of my husband.

Oh, God! I feel numb and cold and dead.

CHAPTER XXII

AUGUST, 1906

RAIN, rain, rain! It beats against the narrow windows in my turret chamber; a cold, late August day is dying, and soon I must dress and go down to our grim dinner of just Humphrey and Algernon and me.

How have I passed these two months? I hardly know. For the first three weeks the exuberant satisfaction and arrogance of Humphrey from the success of his investigations and the honors poured upon him in consequence, kept us in London, being a good deal entertained. Hugh stayed in Paris, and through Letitia I heard of him. We had agreed not to write. Letters, with Humphrey in the same place as I am, are too unsafe. Then we came back to Redwood at the end of June.

Although he seems to have had nothing but pleasure and incense to his vanity, this trip has aged my husband—he is growing into an old man. And all July he had fever, on and off, and was very sorry for himself and terribly irritable. After the first burst of apparent gladness to be in England again, he subsided into one continued grumble at me, and when Letitia, who came down to spend a Saturday to Monday with us, taxed him with it as seriously as she could in chaff, he said, that was one of the reasons a man married for—to have some one to swear at.

One awful moment passed in London, when I was dressing for the Court Ball. Parton had just slipped my frock over my head, and was fastening it up when, without knocking, Humphrey walked into the room.

He was dressed in his gala uniform, with all his orders on, and he looked a very splendid old man—and I realized if he had been an uncle or a father, I should have felt very proud of him.

He had come, he said, to see that I was nearly ready, so as not to be a moment late; and suddenly, as he watched the arranging of the soft silver draperies under Parton's hands, a hideous look grew in his eyes, and I stiffened with a sickening fear.

And, as the maid went to fetch my jewels, which were laid out on a table at the other side of the room, he bent and kissed my neck with brutal violence, while he murmured in a thick voice of horrible, coarse appreciation:

"You look damned well to-night, Guinevere."

Over me crept all the agonizing terror and disgust of the first days of our marriage. So sick was I with horror that I could have screamed aloud. And he saw my face, and drew back instantly.

"Hateful Iceberg!" he rasped out. "You would freeze the devil himself."

And I nearly said aloud my thoughts of, "Oh! for that, thank God." These things are beyond the power of human beings to control; that utter revulsion of the flesh at the touch of those we do not love cannot be commanded either to come or to go.

This hideous fear that my better looks might again waken some spark of emotion in my husband has haunted me so that now I think I am as pale and quiet as ever. The hopeless days go on—and soon my Beloved will return from Scotland and be once more at Minton Dremont; and how will it be then?

Oh! rain, you are in unison with my thoughts; but I must have courage and fight my fight and do my duty—and that is to dress now and sweep down the stairs with dignity and keep the artificial ball of conversation rolling at dinner, and avert any possible passage-at-arms between my husband and my son. Algernon is growing to hate his father, I believe, and deceives him whenever he can. Now, in the summer, when they have not the hunting to talk about, there are ructions between them all the day long.

The whole atmosphere is full of storm and unrest. The grooms in the stable tremble at the master's approach—the footmen grow clumsy with nervousness, and even Hartington shows signs of strain.

"O Lord, mother," Algernon said after lunch to-day, "isn't this jolly different to Easter and Minton Dremont?" But I could not answer him; a lump had grown in my throat.

Humphrey is beginning to remind me of "Red Eye" in that

masterpiece of Jack London's about which I have spoken before.

I dare say if I loved him I might even now influence him to gentler ways; but, like the emotions of the flesh, emotions of the mind cannot be commanded either to come or to go; and all that I can force myself to do is to be meek and quiet, and irritate him as little as I can.

This is the price fate is making him pay for stealing my youth and my freedom and crushing out their resistance to his will. I realize all these laws now, and know that each of our actions must be paid for by ourselves, for good or ill.

. . . . . .

Hugh came yesterday—he rode into the courtyard on Cæsar. I saw him through the iron gates from the garden. Oh! my Beloved! A great quivering sigh burst from me—but it was half pain.

I let him go in and stay some time with Humphrey, and then I crept back up the turret stairs to my room and went down from there casually into the library, where they were sitting talking of the prospects of birds for the shooting season. I called out to one of the dogs as I opened the door, that Hugh might know I was coming, and would have time to control his face; and so we greeted one another in the most ordinary way. And there we three sat, going through this comedy, and if the pain caused by the longing and aching for my lover's presence all these weeks had not been upon me, I could have laughed a bitter laugh.

Humphrey was in quite a good humor, and evidently thought Hugh shared his feeling of finding my presence a bore.

He showed no sign of leaving us, nor could I devise any plan for securing word with Hugh alone. We just sat and sat—until Hartington announced tea was ready in the hall, and we went out there.

A grim suit of armor stands on each side of the great fireplace, and it always seems that hollow eyes are watching from the lowered visors. They give me always uncanny creeps. I particularly dislike the hall, but Humphrey has ordered tea to be brought there for this last week.

Oh! the pain and the irony of it all! To pour out the tea and ask if Hugh took cream and sugar, and to give forth platitudes with no hope of a sentence alone. It would be impossible to understand the chafe of this situation if one had not been through it.

I know so well every line of Hugh's face and every expres-

sion of his eyes, and I saw that he was at explosion-point with the restriction of things.

But nothing happened to help us, and I was obliged to give an icy hand and only let my eyes speak the anguish I was feeling, with my back turned toward Humphrey, as we said good-bye, and when they were both gone toward the court-yard again I rushed back to my turret room and gave way to a passion of tears.

O God, how am I to bear it—day after day!

. . . . . .

Hugh came to dine this evening, invited by Humphrey. It has rained so constantly since he was here last week that I have not had the chance to ride even, and no prospect of seeing him has occurred. The unspeakable restlessness of the empty days! To-night I felt the wildest excitement, and Parton said as I finished dressing:

"You look so dreadfully pale, ma'am—would you not take a little sal volatile before going down? Lady Langthorpe told me I was to be very careful of you."

I drank the nasty stuff, and when I went into the drawing-room I saw by the clock that I was three minutes late, and Hugh had arrived. Hartington has orders never to delay announcing dinner for any one, once the master of the house is in the room; but he stretches a point for me, and entered with me.

Humphrey, however, was not deceived, and glowered as I shook hands with Hugh.

"What do you keep us waiting for, I should like to know?" he snapped. "Upsetting the discipline of my house! Are you ill, madam?"

"No," I answered, with what dignity I could. "Let us now go down." And I took Hugh's arm, while Humphrey followed with Algernon, too close upon our heels for us to be able to say one word; but I felt Hugh's dear sympathy, and all through dinner at intervals I saw that his eyes sought my face anxiously. And at last he said:

"Mrs. Bohun does look very pale to-night, General, doesn't she?"

"Modern women are impossible people!" Humphrey rejoined. "They can't stand anything. If they don't have every little fancy gratified, they go white about the gills. But I am too old to pander to them. Let 'em alone is my principle! Guinevere pretends that this place does not suit her—confounded nonsense!"

I looked at Hugh imploringly, for I knew how this speech

would make him feel; he shut his lips tightly and lowered his eyes to his plate.

Algernon had a sardonic grin upon his countenance. Sometimes it would seem that he actually enjoys his father's harshness to others in the relief at its not being directed against himself.

He goes to bed very soon after dinner, so when an hour later Humphrey and Hugh did join me in the drawing-room, I was alone.

My husband likes to stay as long as he can in the dining-room, chatting with any man who may be here.

He settled down in his chair at once, and soon went to sleep when I played the piano as usual.

Then, at last, Hugh came to me, leaning upon the lid. We spoke in gentle whispers, while my fingers continued to evoke sounds. Of the hideous misery of the last days, of the longing to see each other again—and all the time there was the uneasy sense that Humphrey might at any moment wake and be suspicious, from the fact that my lover should be standing so near to me.

The pain was far greater than the pleasure—and there was the gnawing, aching desire just for one kiss—one touch.

We arranged that whenever I saw the slightest chance of coming out and meeting Hugh in the park at our copse, I was to contrive to post him a word the day before. He had told William, still at Minton Dremont, to be in readiness for any requirements; and with this poor consolation in front of us we have now to be content.

When an hour had passed in tender, passionate whisperings, I made Hugh go back to the seat beside the fireplace opposite Humphrey, and then I crashed some loud chords to wake him up.

"What a din you are making, Guinevere," my husband said crossly. "You seem to have quite lost your old touch." And then he blew his nose violently, and took a pinch of snuff—a habit which has been growing on him lately—and, rising, he linked his arm in my lover's and drew him toward the door.

"Let us go and have a drink and a smoke in my den, Dremont," he growled. "My lady wife looks tired, and will be glad to go to bed." So we said a stiff good night, and they went off down the great stairs. And I was preparing to go and creep up my narrow ones in the pitch dark, when I heard Hugh rushing back—on pretence of having left his cigarette-case, it appeared. He rapidly crossed the room,

and for the briefest second clasped me in his arms, and then left.

Now I am sitting here, and it is past midnight. Oh! there must be many women in England who are going through just the same situation as I am—how I send out my sympathy to them all, and how, I wonder, does the hurt of having to dissemble like this, sear their souls and scorch them, as it is scorching mine?

Petrov—do not blink at me—your blue-gray velvet face is cynical to-night, and your orange eyes are mocking. What do you think of things, my cat?

. . . . . .

A month has passed, and we have met twice—by stealth, my lover and I—but oh! the bitter-sweet pain of it—the sickening dread of detection—the heartache and the wrench at parting. We can neither of us be natural, even in the short moments we are together; we can only cling to each other in passion and fear.

Humphrey and I lunched at Minton Dremont; he would not dine, he has a fit of gout coming on, and even the information that he is to be made a K.C.B. has hardly improved his temper.

It seemed horrible to be there in Hugh's house with Humphrey, every corner of it filled as it is with sweet and tender memories of us two alone. The sense of unreality—and of strain—was hateful.

Hugh is miserable to see me so pale and quiet, and to know that he can no longer have the chance of bringing life and happiness to me.

My soul is warping, and I can only feel alternate fits of wild rebellion and utter depression. I cannot bear it much longer. Something must happen; it is impossible to live like this. Hugh's dear face, too, is haggard and full of anxiety, and he says reckless things unlike his former self.

Algernon has gone back to Eton—pleased to go—even from Snack and Pip and ratting in the old barn.

"Ghosts are all tommy-rot, mother," he said, on his last evening, "but there is some beastly thing about this house that makes everything seem to go wrong."

. . . . . .

And now it is late October, and the wind is howling in the sodden trees, and it seems as if the Lady Margaret's spirit sighed often behind me—and from beneath the west windows there comes a pitiful groan.

I know all this is imagination, but sometimes I feel as if I should go mad.

To-morrow, Humphrey has to be in Wareford for the whole day, on county business, and I shall risk everything and go for a ride in the park at Minton Dremont. I had to dissemble and plan, and get a letter to the postman just as he was taking the bag this morning, to let Hugh know—and the horrible fear of being detected by Humphrey left me cold and trembling until the man was out of view.

I have made up my mind what I shall say to my Beloved—he is free and I am not. I shall beseech him to go away—away on a long tour. It has come to this, that agony must drive him from his home and make him wander in search of peace—and I, left alone, must bear as I can.

Oh! indeed, the price of love—when not blessed by the Church—is heavy enough.

. . . . . .

We met in the copse, and old William held Jenny Wren there, while Hugh and I went through the autumn trees to the garden door, and so to his sitting-room. And here for a while we could only sob out our passion and misery in each other's arms, and then I put before him the decision I had come to.

"Hugh," I whispered brokenly, "I cannot bear it—I cannot take it as they do in the world, Letitia says—as a joke and an adventure; every time I have to stoop to scheme and plan and act to Humphrey to be able to see you, I feel utterly degraded and low. It will tarnish our great love, dear lover—it will put a blight upon that which was pure and true, and spoil even our memories. Hugh—I implore you—go away—away, away, a long way off—a voyage round the world—anything, until we can both master ourselves—and crush passion, so that our meetings can be free from this awful pain."

He buried his face in his hands.

"Oh! my God!" he said hoarsely. "Has it come to this, then, darling, that I have brought sorrow into your life, and can no longer chase it away?"

"No—no, Hugh! You must not say that," I cried, in pitiful distress. "You have brought divine joy and fulfilment—you have taught me the meaning of nature and life, and what it is to live in God's way—but now fate is too hard for us. If we stay here in this atmosphere of deceit—" and I stopped, the sob rose too quickly in my throat.

Hugh started to his feet, as though I had struck him; he walked rapidly across to the fireplace and back, his stern face working in anguish—and then he seemed to come to some resolve.

"Guinevere," he said, and he sat down beside me again, and took both my hands, "heart of me—I will do whatever you ask me—but what will our lives be parted, and eating our souls out alone? Is it not better to throw the whole thing over? Come away with me—off now in my yacht to the southern seas. We need never return to England for years. Let your husband divorce you, and we will then marry immediately we can. After a while, we could go and live at Bransdale, and shut up Minton Dremont—Guinevere——"

I laughed wildly, while the tears blinded my eyes.

"Ah! Hugh, do you think Humphrey would ever do that—divorce me! He would track us to the world's end, and kill us both without a moment's compunction. It would give him pleasure—yes—pleasure and excitement like a wild-beast hunt. And until he came, I would live in haunting fear, and at last go mad, every moment that you were away from me, in terror lest he had trapped you and done you to death. Oh! you do not know him, and the Bohun spirit and its vengeance. Think of the poor Cavalier, and violence has occurred again and again in their history! The divorce court would be a joke to Humphrey; he has always boasted nothing but the death of any unfaithful Bohun wife would ever wipe out the stain on the Bohun name—he is not a bit like modern people—just a savage, Hugh."

"How frightfully unjust," my dear one cried, clenching his hand passionately. "And to think of his own past life, Guinevere—and even last year—there was a story I heard in London— Oh! such a man should be exterminated by his kind—and we are powerless—you and I—but I would be perfectly willing to fight with him for you, my darling—since he goes back to primitive savagery in this dramatic way. If it is only a question of fighting—I am perfectly ready to chance my life."

"There is something else, Hugh," I answered sadly. "There are the currents we should draw upon ourselves. My broken obligation to my son, until he is grown up and can protect himself. And I could not ever have happiness knowing I had destroyed his ideal of his mother—now when he is too young to reason out the justice or the moral right of the case—I would seem to him as an evil creature, and I

would be made to appear more so by the whole Bohun family. Hugh, it is my glory that you are my lover, dearest—but, as Letitia once said when she made me understand myself and the real meaning of things, I have no right to hurt the community—Hugh! I must stand by my beliefs, even if they break my heart."

"But how can we part, Guinevere!" he exclaimed, rather wildly. "It is the end of life, that is all, darling."

"Yes," I agreed, with the tears streaming from my eyes. "But it is better that than that our souls should grow fierce and defiant and tarnished. Hugh, promise me that you will go away for a time; you are free and can do so—I am chained and cannot, dear lover, or I would not ask you to leave this, your home."

He knelt down beside me, and buried his face in my lap—and when he looked up it was strained and white with agony.

"Darling," he almost sobbed, his strong frame trembling. "I adore you—never more than to-day. You are the truest and the purest woman for a man's worship. This anguish is the reality of that farewell you played last year. Now kiss me once more, and I will go away, I promise you, until I can master myself sufficiently to be able to come back again in peace."

So, with bitter, blinding tears, we parted at last—my lover and I, there in the copse—when we left the sitting-room, and I mounted Jenny Wren and rode homeward.

And I cannot write of my sorrow, or the long, pitiful ache of the autumn days.

CHAPTER XXIII

APRIL, 1908

I DO not know where to begin to take up the thread of my life again after all this long time. Eighteen months have gone past since Hugh went away, and Minton Dremont has seen him no more. One thinks one cannot bear things, and that anguish must kill one, but it does not if one is young enough and strong. I shall be thirty-four years old in June, and in outward appearance I am not changed at all, it would seem, by what Letitia says; only I am utterly so in the inner me.

Those first weeks were all such a blank anguish, I can hardly separate one from another, except that by Christmas time Humphrey grew so ill with gout and an attack of bronchitis, that he was ordered abroad for the rest of the winter—and once more I found myself at St. Raphael, with Algernon fretting during the whole of those holidays at missing the hunting. He was obliged to be quiet about it before his father, but he vented it on me with true Bohun instinct. He is growing so distressingly like Humphrey that an utter hopelessness comes over me, because it shows me more strongly than ever the uselessness of my fighting against nature, which seems more powerful than any environment or surrounding influence of people.

Algernon has seen and suffered from the result of his father's temper and injustice, and yet this has been no lesson to him. He hits out in exactly the same manner when anything crosses him. Eton prevents his growing into a bully openly, but I cannot help fearing that now, when he is going to have fags of his own, their situation will not be all joy, judging by his ways with the animals and groom and stable strappers.

We came back to England too late for the races last Easter; another cause of anger and repining to him: he loathed having to join us abroad again, Humphrey insisting upon his doing so and refusing a tempting invitation from the Morvaines.

Then we settled down at Redwood Moat once more in the beautiful late spring of last year. Letitia had a letter or two from Hugh after he first went away, but the final one said he was going far into Tibet and would be for many months in inaccessible places—and since then there has been silence, and no one knows where he is or what has happened to him.

I have used every strength I possess to crush out emotion in myself—I have forced myself to do all my duties—to the villagers, in the county, and in the household—with extra care. I wish I had one of those characters able to take a deep interest in outside affairs, but the repression of my life for so many years, the fear of Humphrey, and the habit of living always in a world of my own into which he could not penetrate, and could not dominate with his shadow, has become too strong to overcome. I am a silent, solitary person, and I cannot help it. I have been through the severest discipline with my mind, of long and deep courses of the study of abstruse subjects that require all my intelligence to grasp, especially this new wave of the scientific investigation of the forces that affect us beyond the material, which seems to have swept over civilization with the new century.

And the result of this knowledge of cause and effect makes me know that, because Hugh and I went against the tremendously strong current invoked by the beliefs and prejudices of centuries in the breaking of the law of man, we must pay the price to its end, and only God knows what that end may be. Since we are not of the natures which can feel all things lightly, as Letitia says they do in the world, our pleasures and our pains must always be deep. I have grown to take a more profound interest than ever in the garden and nature, and all the dear plants and flowers—and they seem to bring me comfort and hope that some day, when the debt is paid, we shall come into peace.

I am not fighting against fate, I am bearing it as well as I can; and often I sit at the east window and send forth strong and loving thoughts and prayers for the welfare of my Beloved.

I feel and know nothing evil has befallen him, and some

day he will return, and perhaps we shall both be strong enough to meet as friends.

How glorious life would be if one had known always how to draw to oneself only good, and avert evil—if one had been taught from the beginning these wonderful laws, one could have avoided that which must bring pain. Surely the next generation, who will have the chance of knowledge, will be splendidly happy people.

For me, I always used to ask myself in my first years of warping wretchedness and ignorance: What does it all mean? To what end? Do great actions and fine aims bring peace and happiness, or is everything chance? And if there is no such a thing as chance, but that every circumstance and event of our lives is the direct result of our own action, how are we to know how to direct that action since we cannot always foresee its result? And then I began to read and understand little by little, and make small experiments—and look back and draw deductions; and I have come to realize that it does really all lie in our own hands individually and in the community what we draw to ourselves, and it seems to me that the theory of former lives is the only one which contains justice. My marriage to Humphrey, about which I had no say, must have been some debt I had to pay for some former action. My love for Hugh has been the awakening of my soul to the highest things, but as my debt is not yet paid, it must bring me suffering until that is worked out.

. . . . . .

Letitia was at first very angry with me, for what she called my "stupid seriousness."

"Why in the world, Guinevere," she said, "could you not have taken the affair as every other woman does, instead of having all those exalted feelings about it? Here is poor Hugh sent off from his home because you feel degraded when you deceive Humphrey, who entirely deserves that fate. It would have been my pride and delight to match my wits against his, and it would have added all the zest of a continual excitement. But you hopelessly serious 'Eagle' people must always drag in tragedy. I have no patience with you!" —and then she softened as she looked into my face. "Dear little sister," she went on more gently, "you are suffering horribly, of course, in a manner we none of us know anything about. Winnie's way, for instance, was to be so upset when she heard Hugh had gone, that, although it was much too late in the year, she went right off to some German baths

—and tried to give us all the impression he had bolted on her account! She behaved like a sorrowing widow for quite three months, until past Christmas—and only got over it when she felt the stimulation of taking Bobby L'Estrange away from Ermyntrude was possible. The whole set have had ructions, and have seemed to have gone to pieces without the crystallizing centre of Minton Dremont and the fight for Hugh."

"Don't let us talk about my stupidity, Letitia," I implored her. "I know it—I know, according to every sensible view, I am a perfect idiot; but I cannot help it—I could not have gone on with the situation as it was, or Hugh either. As you say, we have Eagle ways, I suppose—and only desire one mate."

Langthorpe had a bad accident while he was riding in the Park, at the end of June, and very nearly died, and Letitia nursed him with the utmost devotion, giving up her whole remaining season, and then taking him down to Cheshire to recruit. She stayed there with him, nothing but a nurse, until late in September, so I did not see her all the summer, as Humphrey would not allow me once to go away from home. But in the autumn she came again to Redwood Moat.

She was horrified to observe the change in Humphrey; he is so irritable that even to her he could not always keep up his gallant manner, and rasped once or twice, while, although I try always to be perfectly meek and gentle to him, I can do nothing right in his eyes, it would seem. His health is quite restored now, though, and except for occasional fits of gout, he is as strong as ever and has hunted all this last winter. But nothing will induce him to allow me to leave him; I have hardly been to London to shop, even for a day. It is not that I see much of him—not at all, practically, except at meals—but he likes me to be there to go through the same stiff duties day after day, and play him to sleep in the evenings. We have had very few visitors—only dear old Sir John Kaird, except the usual parties for the partridges and pheasants.

Algernon's holidays this year—the second since Hugh went away—have been rather a trial, because of the rows between him and Humphrey, both at Christmas and Easter. Their two haughty faces glared at one another often at dinner, and Humphrey seemed to experience a delight in humiliating the boy. "Taking it out of the young cub," he called it.

Algernon was sixteen this March, though to look at he might be eighteen or nineteen at least. I do not think in my

life I have ever seen any one so handsome; everything about him is physically perfect, but for the hard brilliancy of his splendid eyes. Women are already growing to take too much notice of him. In the hunting field all these last Christmas holidays, which we spent here, they flattered him; but as yet, I am thankful to say, he is perfectly indifferent to their blandishments and rather resents their attention. This state of things cannot go on for long, though, with his strongly passionate type.

Humphrey always insinuates that, at this age, he had already begun to take an interest in women. It utterly revolts me, and I pray that the remote touch of me in my child, which gave him the gray eyes, will be enough to keep some refinement of spirit in him. But Humphrey says the coarsest things before him, and if it were not that I know he has a complete respect for me, and so holds at least one woman high, I should think his opinion of the sex could not be ever anything but base. There is a perfectly ruthless, brutal material common-sense about him, which leaves me frozen at times. To neither my husband nor my son is there anything really sacred or beautiful and true; but I have no right to wonder or lament that not one atom of love or tenderness seems to be in Algernon's spirit. He was created when fear and horror and protesting hate had the only sway of me. Oh! what a terrible responsibility it is to bring children into the world, and how pitiful are the ignorance and the thoughtlessness of half the inhabitants of it on this subject. All I can do now is to try in every way to soften the boy by my love and gentleness, and make up to him for what in my piteous youth and want of understanding I brought him. If he had been Hugh's son—but I must not think of such things.

. . . . . .

It is early May just now, and Letitia—with Langthorpe! —has come to spend a Saturday to Monday with us, and to-night we have talked in my shrine as in former days.

"I got so accustomed to my old boy, his having been so weak and helpless for so long, and nothing but a kind of baby to me, that now I feel quite lost without him," my sister said, by way of explanation as to why she had brought her husband with her. "He is really one of the greatest dears I know, Guinevere—and I am forty-four, and can now have a little rest with him—I have grown rather tired, sometimes, of those younger men, except Gerald Northey—he remains

an adoring, fresh, young inspiration—but that is a thing apart—" She stopped suddenly, and looked long at me as I sat there in the great oak chair opposite her—she herself being in the more comfortable hooded one that is covered with faded magenta brocade.

"Guinevere," she remarked at last, "your face is like a saint's, dearest. Not one of those tiresome, sickly, goody creatures one sees in pictures—but what one would mean to one's self by a saint. It is as pure as a lily and almost transparent—and you haven't aged a day; but your eyes look as if they had seen and known the whole of life, and were now fixed beyond, in a queer peace. You are growing very beautiful, little sister."

"Oh! Letitia!" I sighed, "I am not a saint at all—I am just trying to live as calmly as I can—because I have always the strange feeling that I am waiting for something—and yet, what am I waiting for? I do not know—for the last months, four at least—I am waiting in an unconscious expectancy—of what? Whatever happens, it seems to be only passing, as though events, places, people, actions, thoughts—all, all were as the telegraph poles seen from a train window, while my soul rushes on—where?"

"You wonderful creature, Guinevere," Letitia said. "Perhaps, in the end, you will get your heart's desire. Tell me, do you still love Hugh as absolutely as ever—now that you have not seen him for nineteen months?"

A great shiver ran through me. Do I love Hugh as much as ever!

And I answered from the depth of my being:

"While there is life in my body, and while my soul is conscious to all eternity, Letitia, I shall love Hugh always and absolutely—for me there is no other man."

"It almost frightens me," my sister said, and she shivered a little, and drew her chair nearer the glowing logs—the night was clear but cold and chill. "Because I have a piece of news for you. At the end of May Hugh is arriving in England, and will probably return to Minton Dremont—and what will you do then, Guinevere?"

A breathless moment passed, and I answered—very low:

"I hope God will direct me to do whatever is the best for us all, Letitia."

"You think you will be able to be friends?"

"I—trust so—" and I rose abruptly from my chair and went and looked out of the north window. I felt stifling.

I opened the casement wide and drew back the thick silk curtains, and there the moonlight flooded the view.

"Well," said my sister, rising also, "good night now, darling—you think over it, and don't be a dog-in-the-manger. If you can't have Hugh yourself, you had better get him to marry some decent girl—it is rather awful to think of Minton Dremont going to those utterly impossible cousins."

And when she had gone, I went back to the window again, and there stayed until the dawn—but I cannot write of the torment of my thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIV

JUNE, 1908

LETITIA went to Paris for Whitsuntide—Whitsunday fell this year on the seventh of June—and there, at the Ritz, Hugh joined her party. He did not come to England straight—after all.

From the moment I knew of his arrival, a wild, unconquerable excitement took hold of me. It is pitiful that after nearly two years of hard fighting with myself to suppress emotion that this should be so. I have spent hours in my little shrine, praying silently to God. I have never prayed to love Hugh less, only to be able to conquer the outside expression of my passion so that we may meet as friends. But, alas! I grow feverishly excited when the moment for the posts comes, and a letter from Letitia can be expected—and this morning one arrived. There was nothing much in it but gossip about the world, except that Hugh was there with her and looked well and gay and bronzed—not a word from him, or message for me. This is as it should be, of course, but it made me feel sick and cold as I read. I have enough self-control to force myself to go through my duties and show no sign; but the gnawing agony of unrest is terrible to bear—much crueller as a pain than the utter desolation of the days after our parting. That was numb despair—this is the rack.

The only things which soothe me are to play for hours on the little piano alone in my turret chamber, or to moon along on Jenny Wren in Corlston Chase or the park of Minton Dremont. The underwood in our copse has grown quite thick now. Ah! the memories the sight of it calls up!

. . . . . .

Letitia's second letter announced that Hugh intended returning to England at the end of the week.

"He is quite ready to be friends if you are, Guinevere," she wrote. "So after all, things may go well—and you must always remember you have at least had your cake—and it is not fate's fault but your own intense natures' if you cannot go on nibbling at it all the time as sensible people would. And there is one thing to realize and face, which no woman is willing to do, and that is that the nature of man is not inconsolable, and he can always find distractions. It is unjust that the main suffering invariably falls upon the woman, but so it is—because she is the weaker creature, and Nature always punishes all weak things. Hugh was frightfully unhappy, no doubt, for a long while—but he has had a splendidly sporting time, and he has returned with a fresh zest for civilization, and of course is having every sort of incense to his vanity poured over him by every woman he sees. He is free, he can go where he pleases and indulge whatever fancy for distraction may appeal to him—but you, Guinevere, are chained to Humphrey and Redwood Moat, day after day, and year after year. Any other woman in your situation would take Hugh casually and agreeably as a lover again, if he is willing, and look upon him as a relaxation, a richly deserved weekly outing, as no doubt hard-worked bank clerks look upon their Sunday game of golf. But you say you cannot do that sort of thing, it all means too much to you—the hurt to your soul in having to circumvent your husband, although you feel morally free and of course are ethically so as regards him. But this hurt to your own soul is such that it obliges you to cease having Hugh for your lover. Well, all that is plain then, little sister; therefore, since this is your conviction and you can't help being that lofty, pure sort of person, you have absolutely no right to either let yourself grieve, or repine at the results of a situation entirely created by yourself and your own beliefs. Fate sent you the most darling lover a woman could wish for—with a house nice and close, too, and all perfect, in answer to your prayer to live before it was too late. But your exalted soul won't let yourself enjoy those good things—so there it is.

"I could understand it better if you were orthodoxly religious like Ada thinks she is—and felt pricks of conscience upon the question of the sanctity of the marriage tie, whether it is empty or has lost its original meaning or no—but that has nothing to do with it in your case. You feel it no sin to have had Hugh as a lover—you only feel you are degrading

yourself by deceiving Humphrey. Now I have analyzed the whole situation, though goodness knows! we have thrashed it out often enough before—the only reason that makes me go all over it again is to rouse your common-sense, to try and assist you not to suffer more than you need do. Stick to being nice friends, if you can; if you can't, either crush your supersensitive honor toward Humphrey and enjoy life again —(remember, Humphrey doesn't deserve a moment's extra consideration so long as you do your duties toward him in every way)—or a third course is, if you cannot make yourself do that, then have a final break with Hugh and let him marry some one else. I can quite understand while you were everything to a man, with your attractive looks, and exquisitely cultivated intelligence, to say nothing of your wonderful love for the creature, he would not care a snap for anything else on earth or whether he had an heir or no—but if he can't have you for his love and yet mayn't have another woman for his wife and the prospect of a son, it is abominably hard upon him. So face all these points, Guinevere, and make up your mind. I will stand by you, however you decide—and you have my deepest sympathy, because far down in my heart I have always the odious remembrance that I am more than half the cause that you are married to Humphrey—papa would not have dared to agree to Humphrey's passionate demand if I had not backed it up, and driven him almost. What awful things one does when one is young and self-confident and ignorant, doesn't one! I thought, having married Langthorpe and being prosperous, with a great position in the world, that nothing else mattered, and that I was being awfully clever and kind securing the rich old Humphrey for you. You were always such a white, silent, gentle little thing; nobody but Bob ever understood you or imagined you had an atom of character. I thought Humphrey would be kind to you, and spoil you and give you everything you wanted that I had already got, and I knew papa was dying then, and when he did you would not have enough to live comfortably even, as every sou of his money went with the place.

"You can remember, Guinevere, how hideously poor we were—and the struggle to pay Fräulein Strauss and send Bob to Eton. It all seemed too awful to me to look back upon after I left home and married, when mamma died. But now I know that no human being has the right to force another's fate, and that I did a terrible thing to you, poor little sister! You will probably see Hugh in church on Sunday

for the first time. I tell you this to avoid your being anxious, and wondering when you will be likely to meet him. I shall come down to Minton Dremont myself when I get back, and see how things are going. So now, good-bye."

Thus the letter ended. And as I read, the closely written sheets fell from my hands, and all things became a blank for a few moments while I stared into space.

Yes, my sister had put the case fairly—and I must make up my mind—and then, for the second time in my life, I flung myself on the floor, in this my turret room, and, burying my face in the faded silk curtains of the east window, I gave way to passionate weeping.

. . . . . .

I have seen Hugh. He came, as Letitia said he probably would, to church on Sunday. The Dremont pew is on the other side of ours, and unless whoever is sitting in it turns round, I can only see the back of the head. But Hugh came in after we did, and I saw him as he walked up the aisle.

He looks splendidly well and very bronzed, and yes—a little older—and when the sun fell on him in a shaft, I saw a thread or two of silver shining in his brown hair. He was thirty-nine years old this April, my Beloved One.

In all my life, I have never prayed in church as I did this Sunday. Prayed for his welfare and his happiness, and that we might have peace. For I have not been able to come to any decision—only to try my hardest to remain just nice friends. I *cannot* face the other two alternatives yet. And all through the long sermon that the old parson gave us I let my thoughts wander, and my spirit went back to two years ago, and the time of perfect peace and union we had had at Minton Dremont. I look upon that as my only married life—in the sense of God's meaning in marriage—respect and trust and love between two people entirely happy together. It all seemed as though I were looking back across an abyss, and as though I were dead and in some other existence.

Suddenly Hugh turned round, and his dear, dark-blue eyes met mine, and I almost cried aloud: "Oh! God! I love him so!"

The moment was sickening when we came out, and Hugh greeted us warmly with casual friendship on the churchyard path. I remembered that time before when he had been acting a part, after his return from London, and he had feigned indifference—and of the pain it had caused me, and

of my resolutions afterward to understand the reality and let the seeming go. But now I could not tell which was the reality and which the seeming, so I kept myself with an icy calm; I feared even to look into his dear eyes.

Humphrey asked him to come back to lunch with us—an invitation given in a manner impossible to refuse without a very clear reason, and there could be none with Hugh's recent arrival home, and his being quite alone. He accepted, and I do not know if it was imagination on my part, but it seemed almost as though there was a defiance in his tone.

"We must hear of all your adventures in Tibet, Sir Hugh," I said, to try and be natural; he looked at me suddenly again, a flash of inquiry in his glance—and he answered rather coldly.

We were not left alone a moment, of course, by Humphrey before luncheon, and the frightful comedy was kept up. I know Hugh so intimately. I know that whatever his emotions are underneath, whether he only feels friendly toward me or not, he was acting now. I felt it through all the ease of his conversation, principally addressed to Humphrey, and his whimsical descriptions of his adventures. And as luncheon went on, I became more and more silent, the food seemed to choke me—I was only conscious of a helpless ache.

"Adelaide is coming down to-morrow," Hugh announced, as we were leaving the dining-room. "And I do hope, General—by the way, I hear you are 'Sir Humphrey' now since I went off!—and I have not congratulated you! Well, Adelaide will be enchanted to see you again—do come over and lunch one day and meet her."

Humphrey accepted heartily, and they settled it for the Wednesday following, and then Hugh said good-bye to me and left with my husband, who intended to walk back with him through the park.

And as he touched my hand, ungloved now and deadly cold, a strange look grew in his eyes—but what it meant, I know not; and when they were gone, I went out into the garden and paced the walk between the gnarled apple trees; I felt as though the walls of my turret would have crushed me. I must be out in God's sunlight to get some warmth into my frozen heart.

CHAPTER XXV

JUNE, 1908

I DID not wish to go to Minton Dremont on the Wednesday, but Humphrey insisted upon it.

"You are beginning to give yourself airs, Guinevere," he snapped. "And the sooner you cease this sort of thing, the better. It is bad enough for a man to have to live all the year round with a white altar statue of a wife as I have to, without her crossing his will when he wants a little amusement."

My eyes filled with tears, I do not know why, and Humphrey checked himself.

"It was a damned mistake—our marriage," he remarked, in a different tone, "and it has been deuced hard on me, as I have given you everything, though considering our two ages perhaps you'll say I have no one but myself to blame. But you are the coldest bit of womankind I've ever come across—I don't believe any man in the world could have ever made you feel. You were meant to be a nun—shut in a convent."

"I'm very sorry," I returned, my voice trembling, and the tears, gathering, rolled down my cheeks. "I do not mean to cross your will or do anything except what you may wish—I will go and get ready," and I was turning away, when he came after me and caught hold of my arm.

"I don't know what these silly tears are for," he said. "I may be a brute to you sometimes—but I am too old to change, Guinevere—and I don't mean to try now—so you had better learn to put up with me.

Then he kissed me roughly, and gave me a push toward the stairs—and I went on and dressed as quickly as I could. And so we came to Minton Dremont.

Here I fancied Lady Morvaine received us with some faint restraint in her manner, though she was gracious enough, but there lacked her former warmth of personal affection somehow, and it wounded me. Hugh only came in at the last moment, full of apologies for his lateness; he had been seeing some new horses, he explained.

It was the most lovely day, and all the buzing noises of happy insects were in the air. It hardly seemed that this could be the dining-room at Minton Dremont—its atmosphere was so altered. Humphrey did almost the entire talking; he wished to consult Hugh upon the subject of buying a small sailing yacht to cruise about Southampton Water in—his doctor had told him it would be the best thing for him, and set him up for a hard winter's hunting again.

Hugh knew of the very one for him—he had just heard of it.

"You can hire her for this season, General," he said, "and buy her afterward. Her name, strangely enough, is the *Guinevere*—a remarkable coincidence, isn't it!" and he smiled gaily.

During the whole meal he had never once met my eyes; his manner had in it almost an antagonism when he did address me. My unhappiness kept growing and growing in an amazed wonderment at the ways of men.

Here was this man, who had been my dear and much-loved lover—from whom I had parted with bitterest anguish of grief on his side as well as on mine. I had left him with deep resentment against Humphrey and fate—and with every vow of undying love to me. And now, in under two years, we meet again as strangers, with never even a kind, tender word as an echo coming from him to me to lighten the darkness of my life, or even a look of sympathy or understanding friendship. The pain of that hour at luncheon burnt into my soul. After it, the two men went off to the stables to see the new horses—and I was left with Lady Morvaine—but the anguish of everything made talking to her a torture—and I hardly heard what she said, until I realized she was speaking upon the old subject again. She must have been approaching it with tact for some time, but I had not taken it in—I was startled at this sentence:

"Yes, it was a dreadful grief to us when he went off away so far—we do so hope nothing will happen to make him wish to do it again. I never cared very much for all Hugh's friends—except your dear sister, Lady Langthorpe—but I

hoped that among their daughters, somehow, he would find a wife."

"Yes," I murmured. "Well, perhaps he will now."

"You used to have great influence with him, dear Lady Bohun—if you get an opportunity, do please do what you can," she went on. "We are more than anxious now, because Victor Dremont's eldest son has just got into a terrible scrape, and married a very abandoned French dancer, and the second one is wretchedly consumptive, and so is the youngest boy. It is simply heartbreaking for us all."

I rose to my feet. "I really feel for you," I said, "and I will certainly try what I can do—if I get the chance—but now I have just remembered something I must send off by this afternoon's post, so if you will say good-bye to Sir Hugh when they come in—I will walk home quickly through the park, and leave the carriage for my husband."

Human endurance was at an end, I could bear no more.

She at once offered me the motor, but I refused. To be alone among the green trees that I loved would comfort me, and bring me strength, I hoped.

So I went on my way, and I pray that never again can I have in life the same sort of agonizing pain as I suffered then. To be forgotten quite—to have passed beyond even friendship with my dear lover, so that there was almost a bitterness in his manner toward me. Well, he might marry whom he pleased now. Life felt over for me. I am not a coward naturally—I could not have fought all through these two years if I had been, but when I got to the copse I felt sick and faint in the blazing sunlight, and I climbed the little stile to sit down in the cool shade. The brushwood was all breast high, and with difficulty I pushed my way through to the centre where our old bench had stood. There it was still, and I sank down upon it, exhausted with all the cruel torment I had suffered. I felt too miserable to reason or even to think coherently; just a numb, dull agony, as if everything in me hurt.

The tears that had been so near to my eyes this morning gathered again. I do not know how long I sat there, anguish makes moments seem hours—it may not have been much later, when I heard some one coming through the bushes, and I sat still in fear. I hated that a keeper should see me in tears. But the branches parted, and Hugh came forward!

"My God!" he cried—and he held out his arms. "Guinevere—my darling—to find you—so."

I started to my feet. The intense humiliation—that he should come upon me thus, with tearful eyes!

"It was very hot," I said, in a strange voice, unlike my own. "I—I came in here to get a little shade."

"And I came to find you," Hugh answered, anxiety and pain in his tone. "When we got back to the house Adelaide told us you had gone home. The General then said he would drive on into Wareford—so I rushed after you to Redwood—but Hartington said you had not returned—and I feared—I do not know what I feared. I knew I could not have missed you—going—if you had stuck to the path—and then I thought of this our copse, and I came back here as fast as I could, and I find you—with tears in those dear eyes—Guinevere——"

But I did not speak.

"After all these weary months, have you not one word to say to me, dear Love?" he pleaded.

My knees felt as if they must give way beneath me, and I sank once more down upon the bench—he sat beside me, and took both my hands.

"Guinevere, for God's sake, speak to me!" he cried.

"What can I say to you, Hugh?" I whispered, hardly aloud. "I do not understand."

He let go my hands, and clenched his own together.

"No—I ought not to talk to you like this. I thought I had conquered all emotion," he said. "At first, when I went away, it was a sort of madness of agony—and then it grew duller—and then excitement came with the lust of the hunter—and then the interest exploring difficult places—but often, the misery of things remembered made me reckless and perfectly indifferent to danger or possible death—that is why I escaped all harm—I did not care a rush for my life, Guinevere," and he gave a little, bitter laugh. "And then I made myself grow cynical again and forced myself to try and forget all the beautiful, pure things you had taught me, dear. I wanted to stop the pain—somehow—and told myself it was undeserved—and that I would never have brought it upon myself, because I would never have parted from you—and by the time I had got to Paris, I believe I had crushed it. I had regulated the thought of you as you had been to me into something dead and gone out of my life—removed by yourself—and I believed I could come home and see you as you now were with safety—I ached for home sometimes—I did everything I could in Paris to distract myself. I hoped you would look older,

and would not attract me so much—and then I saw you in church—more sweet than ever—and in that one instant I knew nothing had been of any use, and that I love you and only you in the whole world with the same passionate intensity as ever. Then I was full of defiance, so I tried to be brutal—I tried to be cold—I resented that I should have to go through this awful pain again, Guinevere, but I could not bear it, and when I saw you to-day I had only one mad desire—to come after you to tell you I loved you still, to hear you say you loved me. And the moment that I was free I did follow you—and now I find you, and your little face is the most pathetic thing I have ever seen. It looks like a sad child's, and it is ethereally beautiful, too, darling—it frightens me. It does not seem of earth, it is so pale and transparent—Guinevere—Oh! tell me, sweetheart—how has it been with you all these weary days? Tell me——"

"I have fought hard—for peace," I said, very low.

"And have you found it?" he demanded anxiously; and, as I could not answer, he asked again: "And have you found it, Guinevere?"

"No, Hugh," I faltered at last. "Nothing is changed."

"You love me still?" and now his voice had a note of gladness in it—and again he took my hands.

"I have never ceased to love you, Hugh," I told him. "I have never even prayed to do that."

He held out his dear arms to me, and whispered:

"Guinevere—Oh! I am starving!"

Then time and pain, and anguish and thoughts of the future were all forgotten for a brief moment, while I sank into his fond embrace. Human nature was too strong for us; we could resist its force no longer. And if the angels were looking on, their hearts are too compassionate to have blamed us.

But now I am sitting in my turret chamber alone, holding Petrov tightly in my arms. I feel I must grasp something tangible before I float down the tide of fate—Ah! God—whither?

CHAPTER XXVI

AUGUST, 1908

IT is the first week in August now, and we are all at Cowes—Humphrey and Algernon and I on the little yawl, the *Guinevere,* and Hugh on his large racing schooner, the *Hermione*—at least, the *Hermione* is here, but Hugh has been in London to-day and returns with Letitia and Langthorpe to-night.

We have spent all July yachting, Humphrey and I, with only old Sir John Kaird, but Hugh has often been near us and sailed with us—or we with him, and now we have just anchored in Cowes roads for the week.

I have been feverishly happy—I never allow myself to think—I stifle every suggestion of the past or the future—I live breathlessly from day to day. Hugh is happy, too, but without any repression of thought, because he is a man and free and has a right to live as he chooses. He seems to love me more passionately than ever, as though the ache and abstinence of the long months of separation had to be made up for—as though he fears to lose me. He would like never to leave me for an instant, it would seem.

I am reckless—I have never once used subterfuge or acted a lie to Humphrey, so I have not suffered my old sense of degradation. I have left it all to fate—and if Humphrey discovers that Hugh is my lover, then I will drown myself in the sea—before Algernon can ever know—that is the price I will pay, and it is the kind of one Humphrey would agree to and understand.

But it seems as though the forces beyond were aiding us, and my husband himself seems to make everything smooth, and throw us easily into each other's company.

I feel I know now what the French nobles must have felt when they played cards so gaily in the prison, never

knowing when it might be their last game on earth, or on which morrow the axe of the guillotine, for them, might fall.

Once or twice there has been a rough day in the Solent, and it has given both my lover and me pleasure to sail in a tiny boat he has, tearing over the waves together, not caring in the least if one giant should swamp us. A strange, wild, weird joy is exalting us. Humphrey has let me go alone with Hugh without a murmur of dissent.

"It will do her good, Dremont!" he has even said. "Buffet her about a bit, and put some heart into her—get along!"

And these are almost the only times we have been absolutely quite alone. But there have been many different hours of sitting on the deck together and talking in happy peace—while Humphrey and Sir John moved within view.

The whole cruise is doing us all good, I think. Away from the ghosts of Redwood Moat, Humphrey is much more genial—and twice we have had the pleasure of running down the Channel for a day and over to France in Hugh's large boat, which is the most comfortably arranged yacht one could imagine. How I adore the sea—beautiful, treacherous, passionate thing!

Algernon, who came two days ago, is perfectly enchanted with everything. He is absolutely fearless always, and ready to chance any danger if he can only find one to indulge in. He seems to have grown and have got to look older even since Easter. And in his cabin when the steward first unpacked his things I perceived several photographs of Comic Opera chorus stars and one with "Rosie" scrawled across it—what does this mean, I wonder—he stayed in London with his friend Burbridge for two nights at the Morvaine house before joining us here, and I suppose went to the theatre. Burbridge has left Eton and goes up to Oxford in the autumn. I dare not tell Humphrey, of course—and yet it worries me to see these photographs, though there is nothing the least serious in their suggestion. They merely show that the indifference to female blandishment which was apparent in the hunting season has been thawed, and it is absurd to look at Algernon any longer as a child.

Dressed for dinner in his immaculate clothes, he might be almost twenty years old. He is over six feet tall, and not too reedy. He is in the Eleven now, and will play at Lords next year; this is a tremendous triumph for one so young. To-morrow is Saturday, when all the world arrives at Cowes, and we shall land and go into the Squadron

Gardens—and there I shall see Hugh again—and Letitia—they arrive too late for us to meet to-night.

. . . . . .

The week is nearly over—and it has produced new phases between us all. I had never been here before, and was greatly charmed with the place and the whole thing. It would not be possible to find in the world, I should think, such another collection of men who look so like gentlemen as those one sees in the Castle Gardens, though the majority of them are quite old. The yachting clothes are particularly becoming, they make any man appear good-looking; but the distinction and that peculiar ease and *sans gêne* are all their own.

The Squadron Gardens is a place, too, like Eton, ruled by unwritten laws—which are as of the Medes and Persians in their rigid changelessness. Woe to the stranger who transgresses them!—his time there will be brief.

Humphrey met countless old friends, who chaffed him for having been hidden from the world so long, and he became in the best of tempers; we had invitations all the time to lunches, and dinners on the other yachts.

This sort of very neat yachting garment suits me, I suppose, for Letitia told me I was greatly admired, and certainly for the first time in my life I seem to be surrounded constantly by agreeable men, and Hugh's eyes often have the pupils large, and but for Letitia he would do reckless things. It has been fine nearly all the time, too, and we have been able to go ashore and listen to the band in the evenings, seated in those comfortable basket-chairs—and it is then that sometimes my lover is able to whisper to me, and he grows more passionately fond each day. This is the first time he has ever seen me at ease, surrounded by interesting people, and not snubbed continually by my husband, who is too busy here amusing himself to notice me, or what I am doing; and it has added new zest to his love.

In London with Letitia's friends, I was too much on my guard ever to be natural or at ease with any of them, and so could not shine at all. At Cowes, that particular set of women are not much represented. Except Lady Hilda Flint—and Letitia herself—not one of them who matter is here—they do not care for yachting, it would seem. I am so glad of that; I feel free!

"Winnie and Ermyntrude simply loathe the sea," Letitia said, when I asked why they were not tearing after Hugh, as usual. "And Ada has to go to Scotland—they have some-

how always allowed him to have this week to himself by a sort of tacit understanding. It is a mercy, isn't it, considering that now he is back in England they are keener than ever to reconstruct the circle at Minton Dremont and to consolidate it by marrying him off to any one of them that they can!"

I laughed, knowing how deliciously futile their efforts would be.

To-morrow there are to be fireworks, and on Saturday numbers of people go away, and next week we give up the *Guinevere* and return to Redwood Moat, much to Algernon's sorrow.

. . . . . .

There is weeping rain to-day, and I do not know how to write—but I must try so as to collect all my courage—for something terrible has happened and the joy and desire of living is over for me, and I must face an existence now which seems more cruel than death. For in my code of religion we have none of us the right to take our own lives to try to escape from merely personal misery—that course is only justified when it is taken to save the consequences of our actions from falling upon the innocent souls we are responsible for. I would willingly step quietly over the yacht's side now into the gray rain-beaten waters if that would bring me annihilation and so peace—but my soul would only wander for cycles of misery, unquiet and pitiful, as is the Lady Margaret's soul—burdened by my broken responsibility to my son, who has not yet grown to full man's estate.

No—I must live—that is the price that circumstances now oblige me to pay for breaking the law of man—and whatever comes I must bear it with a calm face.

Last night—the night of the fireworks—we all dined on shore at "Egypt," where a merry party is staying, and there was one gallant Irishman who began immediately at dinner to make love to me, and this drove Hugh perfectly mad; he was sitting opposite, and Humphrey on the same side of the table. There was no mistaking the purport of the Irishman's speeches, and his attitude and whole manner expressed the most elaborate devotion. The last two days have been extremely difficult for Hugh and me; we have not once had a chance to be for an instant alone, and, as ever, the irritation of these restrictions has acted upon him to produce the same passionate unrest.

His face at dinner was thunderous with jealous fury. I spent a time of terror, in case Humphrey or any of the rest of the party would notice it. The moment we had finished we all moved out into the garden together to have our coffee quickly, so as to get back to the Squadron Gardens in time for the fireworks. The amorous Irishman was making his way to me when Hugh deliberately stepped in front of him and sat down in the chair—and with supreme insolence then apologized to Captain O'Gorman, but did not attempt to give up the seat!

His eyes were flashing, as he whispered to me:

"Guinevere—I will not bear it. You belong to me; how dared you let that brute sprawl over you at dinner!"

For the first time in our knowledge of one another, I fired up and answered haughtily:

"How dare you speak to me like that?"

His face quivered with angry pain, while he drew in his breath and shut his lips like a vise. I repented instantly; it was just the Ferrer's spirit in me which arose at being spoken to by my lover so sharply, it was not that I resented his assumption of authority—I admitted and glorified in that.

"Hugh," I whispered contritely, "I am sorry—dearest, please forgive me—I did not mean that. Of course, you have a right to scold me if you choose."

His stern face changed immediately, and, reckless of all outsiders' possible observation, he bent over me with an expression of deep emotion.

"I don't want to scold you, darling," he said in my ear. "I am simply wild with the torment of things. I have grown to love you absolutely to madness lately—far more than ever—and it drives me completely crazy when I see another man making love to you, and I know that I have not the right openly to interfere—and that a few whispers in the Gardens or a snatched kiss in the dark, are all the crumbs of comfort I shall get perhaps for days and days—Guinevere, I have been so awfully unhappy this week, I do not know how to bear my life."

An icy-cold pain stabbed me. This is the first time Hugh has ever said that the situation is causing his existence to be darkened. I could not speak for a moment, it hurt me so. If our love was bringing him torture, then we ought to part again, I felt.

Before I found my words, a general move was made, all to get into the flies which were waiting—the first rocket had gone up. And, seized by Humphrey, I was separated

from Hugh; and he did not rejoin me again until we were standing just outside the entrance to the Castle platform in a blaze of the light of a set-piece of the King and Queen. He came up behind me, and he whispered, his voice vibrating with passion:

"Guinevere, the General is now going back to play bridge at 'Egypt'—Algernon is talking to the Welbrooks in that jolly young party, and the moment this glare is over they will all go and listen to the music as they did last night, without his joining us. And the music does not finish until eleven o'clock, as you know. Directly every one turns back toward the band, say good night to our hostess, put your scarf over your head, and go down to the landing stage; my launch will be waiting; very few of the other yachts' boats are there as yet. I shall already be in it, and we will go off to the *Hermione* and have an hour in peace. Then I will take you to the *Guinevere* and return in time to pick up Algernon, telling him you were tired and went straight on board. The *Guinevere's* boat is to wait for the General."

He did not remain for my reply, but stepped in among the crowd, and I was too moved and miserable to think of disobeying him.

Letitia was nowhere about; she was dining on another yacht, and had not landed at all to-night. There was nothing particularly compromising in my going off from the steps in Hugh's launch—it had taken us all often before, and I might really have been returning to our boat. But still it was the first time my lover has ever chanced anything for me. The passion in him must certainly have risen to a terrible height.

But the lights and the crowd generated excitement, and I felt I did not care what happened; I must see and speak to Hugh in peace.

It reminded me of the old day at Victoria Station when I met him to go to Richmond Park, as I walked down the squadron landing-stage to the launch—and there got in with what calmness I could. Hugh was waiting for me, and we flew over the smooth waters—the *Hermione* was lying fairly close in, and we seemed to arrive in no time; we had not spoken a word, as Hugh steered.

"Lord and Lady Langthorpe returned yet?" he asked cheerily of the first mate who helped us on board—and "Not yet, Sir Hugh," was the expected answer he got; and we went beyond the deck house, where the comfortable chairs are grouped, and where the sailors, when the ship is at

anchor, never come at this hour of the night. There in the shadows Hugh clasped me in his arms, and then he spoke, his dear voice deep with emotion:

"I am perfectly mad, Guinevere. I love you so—it is reckless of me to make you come here, perhaps; but I am beyond that—I cannot bear any more torment to-night."

I felt I understood this, and oh! it was so divine to be with him again after our checks and frets. We sat there watching the stars blissfully content at last, all ruffled sensations between us smoothed now in the happiness of being together alone, and never has Hugh been more adorably tender and fond and worshipping, and never have I loved him with more profound depth. We seemed to be at the zenith of joy—all shadows forgotten and all fears lulled to rest. I shall always remember the beauty of the scene around us, with the illuminated fairy yachts, and the glorious summer starlit sky above.

"Oh, soul of me!" Hugh whispered. "If we could sink down into the dark-blue waters and stay forever thus together for eternity—how good it would be."

And I sighed a fond "yes."

But we were startled from this exquisite dreaming by hearing the echoes of "God Save the King," wafted over the still sea from the gardens, and we rose quickly to our feet!

The band was over, and by no possible hurrying could I be back on the *Guinevere* and Hugh at the steps before Algernon would be standing there waiting for him. Hugh would have to invent an excuse. A chill of foreboding crept over me—I do not know why—and we both hastened into the waiting launch and made all speed to our yawl, and there leaning over the rail was—Algernon! who hailed us.

"Is that you, mother? Where on earth have you been? They told me you had gone in Sir Hugh's launch—I came in our boat soon after you, my beastly nose began to bleed, and I hadn't a second handkerchief."

Hugh followed me up the gangway on to the deck, and there my heart seemed to stop beating for a second—for when the light of the lantern fell on my son's face it seemed as though a suspicious sardonic gleam lurked in his eyes.

It was then that Hugh's nerve and *sang froid* showed itself.

"Your mother has been on the *Hermione* with me—quite safe," he said, with imperturbable calm. "She was so weary of standing about at the fireworks that I took her there to have some coffee in peace," and then he turned to me.

"Don't think of remaining up for me now, Lady Bohun,

since Algernon is here. If he isn't very tired I'll stay with him and have my cigar while I wait for the General. I want to settle about sailing round to Ventnor to-morrow, and we ought to arrange things to-night. We will have to make such an early start."

His manner was the perfection of naturalness, neither too effusive nor too stiff, and we said a friendly good night, and, kissing Algernon, I disappeared below, leaving my lover and my son alone together—there under the stars.

And I knew when I sank trembling on to the sofa in my cabin that Hugh had saved me for this time, but that nothing could ever remove suspicion from Algernon's Bohun mind, if ever it had occasion to be aroused again. No—I was face to face with that other awful side of the case—not the smirching of my own soul this time from the stooping to dissimulate to my husband, but the even more terrible aspect of destroying my son's belief in his mother and raising doubts of her in his heart.

Then, like a ghastly flash of lightning blasting my brain, came the realization that the end had come—the very end, and with a moan I fell forward upon the cabin floor.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE long-drawn-out anguish of these awful days. It rained incessantly without a breath of wind the whole of the Saturday until late in the afternoon, and we were not able to go for our sail. Hugh came on board in the morning early to consult with Humphrey as to what to do; but, being aware my husband had already decided not to try to start, I did not go up on deck. I felt too broken and feeble after my night of misery to be able to face Hugh, knowing the agonizing things I should have to say to him, when next we could be alone. It was better that he should be able to be natural with Humphrey and Algernon once more before he knew. I heard them all laughing and swearing at the rain, then the noise of another boat's arriving, and Algernon's penetrating voice asking if he might accept the invitation the Welbrooks had just sent to go on board their steam yacht, and steam with them round the island and stay and dine. They could have such jolly fun, and did not mind the rain.

Humphrey assented, and Algernon gave a joyous shout, and, clambering down the companion, burst into my cabin with hardly a knock.

"You are lazy, mum!" he exclaimed, "lying on that sofa. The Welbrooks have asked me to go with them for the day, and father has said I may. I haven't a moment—good-bye," and he gave me a hurried kiss and rushed off, and soon I heard the splash of oars, and knew he was on his way.

I felt, as he was gone, I must make the chance to see Hugh somehow.

I got up and went on deck, and called out good morning, and Hugh and Humphrey came from the bows and joined me in the little deck house—descending with me to the saloon.

"Is Letitia up yet?" I asked. "I do want to see her today; we have all been too busy to have a word, the whole week—but in this awful wet she can't want to do anything—will you take me back with you, Sir Hugh?"

"Yes, do," said Humphrey, "and then drop me ashore—I shall go and have a game of bridge at 'Egypt,' and ask for some luncheon after. The sea is sickening in this weather."

So we started, the launch going on with Humphrey, after taking Hugh and me to the *Hermione*. Letitia was not up, of course, nor even awake, Langthorpe told us; he was comfortably smoking in the deck house, with all the morning papers; so Hugh and I went down alone into the saloon. It is perfectly arranged, with its white panelling and blue curtains, and it has a piano and plenty of light.

"I want to play to you, Hugh," I said, after he had folded me in his arms. There was an anxious, questioning look in his dear eyes, as they gazed into mine. I could not speak of terrible things yet with certainly two hours of undisturbed peace in front of us—and I could not talk ordinarily of other matters; and with my heart aching and seared with pain, to make music was the best way to comfort us both.

"Guinevere," Hugh said, as he opened the piano for me. "I *know*, I feel there is something—darling—" and then he seized me wildly in his arms again. "Oh! God!" he whispered brokenly. "I am—afraid—to think what it is. Yes, play to me, dear."

Then he went and flung himself into the corner of the great, deep wall sofa, where he could watch my face—sideways—and there he sat, his tall form crouched together, his attitude constrained.

I played and played for an hour, perhaps—every sort of angel's song, and my own soul floated up in the divine sounds—I seemed to see a bright light beyond the awful abyss of pain.

At last I played him a new thing that I had just got—a modern thing, but one of astonishing meaning and pathos—and all this time Hugh had not stirred beyond a passionate clasping of his hands once or twice. Then I played the "Farewell"—the tears gathering in my eyes ran in big drops down my cheeks.

And my dear lover rose and, coming over, knelt beside me, and drew me close.

"Ah! God! Beloved!" he said, his voice so hoarse with suffering it did not sound like his own. "That is what you

mean, Guinevere. I knew it would come—last night—directly I saw Algernon's face."

"You understand, then," I murmured, with a sob in my throat. "Hugh—we could not love like we do if our souls were so unfine that they could face—the possibility of—that."

"Yes," he said, in anguish. "And to think that, if I had not let passion conquer me last night—the necessity to part might never have arisen;" then he groaned as though his very being was wrung with agony. "Oh—my God, what hideous suffering!—what weaklings we all are!"

It is a terrible, an awesome thing, to see a strong man cry—and as the tears poured down my lover's face, and sobs shook his frame, reason seemed to leave me. At that moment, I felt I would give my life—my soul—to assuage his grief.

"Hugh," I sobbed, "my darling, my lover—Oh! God in heaven! what can I do to bring you comfort? Hugh, this is breaking my heart."

He controlled himself then—and leaned his head against my shoulder—as he knelt there and once more encircled me with his arms.

"Guinevere—my darling, must it be so?" and all the pleading of the world seemed melted in his dear voice. "I will promise—I will faithfully promise—never again to give way to anything that would create a situation that you need fear. I have not the pluck to face again the awful agony of parting from you. You don't—you can't know what you mean to me—more than anything in heaven or earth. You can judge of the colossal importance you are, because I am a man—with the strongest passions, as you know, and accustomed all my life to gratify them whenever I fancied, though I am not altogether a brute. And I am willing to crush them all out—to live like a priest—never to touch you, never to kiss you—never to hold you in my arms again—if you will only let me see your worshipped face, and hear your voice, and live in your atmosphere—Guinevere—I would rather be dead than separated altogether."

"Hugh," I answered, my words almost incoherent with misery. "There would be no use in your promising those things, dear lover—because—I am not so strong—I could not so master myself—and the moment would come when I should ask you to take me back into your arms—and break all vows. If the strength of your love for me shows in

your willingness to try to crush that which is so strongly one of your attributes, mine for you shows equally in the passionate, mad emotion for you which you fill me with—emotion which is entirely foreign to my natural feelings and character—for to all others I am, and always will be, 'ice to the moon.' Hugh—I love you so—I know now—I could never be friends, even if you could. So we must part for ever in this world, my lover. You must go away again, and use all your will this time to forget me—and then come back and do your duty to your family—and your race. I cannot yet ask you to marry another woman—but that day must come. And as those who take the veil and are dead to the world—I will—live on in my prison-house, and do my duty as best I am able to my husband and my son—and, some day, God will give us peace—because our souls will be free, and not blackened with any degradation. Hugh—kiss me a farewell."

And with a sob of agony that still rings in my ears, my lover pressed his lips to mine in a passionate good-bye—and while he still held me to him, Letitia entered the saloon. She stopped for a second with a kindly smile in her eyes, and then she took in the meaning of the situation, and she came toward us, her cheery, glowing face full of sorrow and concern.

"My dear children," she began, when Hugh interrupted her; he rose to his feet, and I rose, too—and then he took my hand.

"Letitia," he said, "my darling is one of God's angels—she knows best—and we must part. Be the dear you are, and help us to get through the hours until Monday like gentlepeople. My best, old friend."

And for the first time in her life, that I have ever seen her, my sister sat down upon the sofa and burst into floods of tears.

. . . . . .

Now I am up in Cheshire, and Humphrey is here, too, while Algernon stays at the Morvaines'—and while my husband and my brother-in-law walk and ride together, Letitia showers kind common-sense and affection upon me—so we get through the days. And I know neither my dear lover nor I will ever cease to remember her goodness to us during that ghastly Saturday and Sunday, or her tact and wisdom. I think we all played the game—as we should have done—and no one, even Langthorpe, had the very least

idea of the tragedy that was taking place in Hugh's life or mine.

I shall keep the picture always of the *Hermione* as she passed our moorings, early on the Monday morning, like a great white seagull, her sails set; and I caught a glimpse of Hugh, and he raised his yachting cap in greeting, and then turned abruptly away—and I knew, if I could have seen them, that his dear, blue eyes were wet.

Soon now we are going back to Redwood Moat again—for Algernon to shoot partridges, and there the round of my old life will begin once more—and I must not be a coward or give way to pain. It will not be as it was before, with some vague subconscious hope that fate would be kind and that after conquering emotion Hugh would return and be friends. Now the severance is as of death. For when he comes back to live at Minton Dremont, I must face the thought that he will marry, and that I shall see another woman in *our* garden and *our* house—and that she, and not I, will lie next his heart.

Oh! God—give me strength and make me numb—or dead—before that day comes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JUNE, 1910

TIME flies—even when it is one long pain; if it is monotonous, the days and weeks go by and leave no mark.

It seemed the first thing which caused me to take any heed of events was when Algernon's Christmas holidays came round that first year. They brought continuous rows and disagreeables with his father. The influence of Redwood Moat seemed to reassert itself soon after we returned from Cheshire, and Humphrey resumed his gloomy, irritable manner—when it is impossible to please him. He was strongly resentful of my pale looks. What was the use, he said, of taking me to the sea and giving up a whole month to my amusement, yachting, if as soon as I came back to my home I should begin to droop again and "go white about the gills"?

I did not venture to remind him that the yacht had been hired upon his account, and not upon mine. I just remained meekly silent, as usual. I feel and know I am more than tiresome, and that a great deal can be said for Humphrey in his having to put up with such a wife. But I do not know what to do or how to make myself different. I try in every way to please him by listening to his stories, and being ready to do anything he may want; but a blank, appalling indifference is always upon me, just as if only the actual machinery of existence were left to me and none of the mental sensations, and then there will come fits of violent grief and emotion, at lengthy intervals, when I can no longer master myself but stay all night sobbing by the east window, waiting for the dawn. Next day after this, I will grow quiet again and pick up the threads with renewed determination to overcome my weakness and take some interest in life.

The astonishing part is that I am not aging much. The intense, unvarying monotony of my life seems to keep everything at a standstill, and but that my eyes are "unfathomable pools of resignation," as Letitia describes them, I am not altered at all, she says. I am glad at this, because in every woman's heart there is a hope that she may long keep that which once pleased her lover.

Algernon is developing a stronger taste than ever for horses and racing and hunting. He knows every thoroughbred by name and pedigree that is going to run in the year, and in some moods Humphrey will encourage him and in some, snub him; and then, when Algernon has left the room, turn angrily and rail at me about his tastes. And when I defend the boy and venture to say that I think Humphrey's methods with him are unjust, he turns upon me, and says I always cross him. The situation is so impossibly difficult, it is unimaginable. Letitia comes down to see us when she can, and rarely I am allowed to go and stay for a day or two with her. And when I am there in London I try to be gay and human again, but it is all a hopeless pretence—life and joy and the meaning of all things left me with the parting from my lover.

And of him some news is heard from time to time. He stayed yachting all the summer and into the autumn, and then started upon an expedition with another man to shoot big game, going from there for more explorations, and did not return to England until the following June. Letitia saw him then in London—very changed, she thought him. He did not once mention me, my sister said; they avoided the subject as one avoids speaking to a recent widower of his dead wife. Hugh was cynical and bitter in his general view of things, and his adoring group of friends buzzed round him in vain. Then he went off to shoot in Scotland, and then abroad to the Rocky Mountains, and from there all over America, and Minton Dremont has seen him only for an isolated day, and we at Redwood Moat not at all. The neighborhood wonder greatly and lament, and go on hoping he will settle down. For me, I do not think I could bear to see him again, and yet I must face the thought, and that other thought—that some day he will marry.

I have once more the strange sensation of waiting for something, an extraordinary expectancy which destroys my numbed peace. It grows so strong at times that I start and glance eagerly at the letters when they come, I know not why, nor what I expect to find. Algernon's summer

holidays last year were spent yachting with us on the *Guinevere,* and, as before, as soon as Humphrey got away from Redwood Moat, his temper and all improved. I do not know anything about what it is which haunts this place, but there is certainly some sinister influence overshadowing it.

Petrov is a very large cat now; he is six years old, but he still adores me, and, I hope, will live for much longer, to comfort me. I had one time of pride and pure joy, when I saw Algernon play at Lords for Eton. For those two days all sorrows seemed forgotten, and nothing but a gladness and exultation filled me as I watched each ball. And this year I hope it will happen again. As a picture of splendid, gloriously beautiful youth, Algernon is faultless. His successes in the hunting-field went on through both the Christmas holidays of this year and last, and now he is eighteen, and a man of the world! And this will be his last year at Eton. In the autumn he is to go to Sandhurst. Altogether, he seems to enjoy himself.

He appears utterly indifferent about women, except those chorus ladies whose photographs he has; and often he gives utterance to exactly his father's sentiments regarding the sex, that brutal matter-of-factness as to their uses and place, which leaves me cold with disgust. He is impervious to any influence of man or woman, but his recklessly fearless going in the hunting-field is winning him respect, just as his prowess at cricket does at Eton. I do not know who loves him, though, besides myself, and sometimes he repels even me and turns me to stone.

He never chases Petrov now; there is a kind of armed truce of mutual hatred and contempt between them.

I have tried and tried to interest him and obtain some softening influence upon him, but in vain. As time goes on, he grows more widely at variance with my every point of view. And when the conversation is not upon sport, he is frankly bored.

Humphrey dislikes staying away from home, and will only go for a shooting visit as the rarest thing; and this last autumn was again very much crippled with gout. Doctor Burnley has warned him to be careful of himself. His fits of rage now leave him quite prostrated, and only a fortnight ago, furious with a groom who had let down one of the horses, he swore until he was inarticulate, and then had some sort of a small fit. He was in bed for two or three days,

and I sat with him for hours, holding his hand and stroking it. I feel a deep and great pity for him.

"Guinevere," he said, after a long silence, "I suppose it was a d——d shame my marrying you so young. I think of it as I lie here. How old are you now, child? Hardly thirty-six, and I am getting on for seventy. Well, I have made you as happy as I can, and, fortunately, you are as cold as ice."

"You have always been very good to me, Humphrey," I responded, "and I want to do everything I can to make you happy now."

He pulled me close to him and kissed me.

"If I'd ever been able to make you love me, it would have been all different; but you couldn't help that, nor I, either—so we must not encourage snivelling regrets. I thought I should soon teach you—you were such a chit, and I had never had any difficulty with women. But it was a mistake, and now everything is too late."

I put my cheek against his strong old hand, and rubbed it, but I could not speak, and to my surprise his hard brown eyes grew glistening and, dragging his hand away from me roughly, and taking a pinch of snuff, he seized his handkerchief and violently blew his nose.

"There, get along, girl," he said. "I am tired, and shall go to sleep."

Of what use are any soft feelings if there is something in you which makes you ashamed to show them even to your nearest and dearest? But this interview left me very sad.

Algernon only escaped by the merest chance from being expelled from Eton in the summer half last year. He went off to Ascot and was very nearly caught, and only long afterward, at the end of the holidays, he owned to me that he had lost a good deal of money and was in a very unpleasant scrape. I paid it, of course, out of what is my own, and he promised not to do this again. It worried me greatly, not for the amount—which was, however, quite enough—but for what these tastes presage for the future.

Easter is over and past; it fell so early this year, and our usual spring has passed, and now it is June again. I wonder if complete numbness will ever come to me, when the mention of Hugh's name will fall upon my ears with indifference, when I can pass the days without repressing my thoughts of him, when I can live naturally, however quietly.

This evening's post brought a letter from Letitia. She has just gone back to London for the rest of the season

after Whitsuntide, and is full in her usual round. The whole of her friends and society generally are convulsed, she says, at the advent of one of the most lovely girls any one has ever seen. She is the daughter of the penniless and eccentric Lord Catesby, who twenty years ago married a beautiful American, who died when the girl was born. Letitia says there was some story about the mother—no one appears to remember what—in any case, the girl has been brought up in the wildest way among servants and stable boys and huntsmen, and then a polish of Paris to finish up.

"She is the most modern creature I have ever seen," Letitia writes. "I should think there is nothing of life she does not know. She is as beautiful as a goddess—tall and most voluptuously proportioned, with bright blue eyes, pink-and-white skin, and ripe, corn-colored golden hair; a perfect mass of frizzy curls everywhere. She has no charm—just a brilliant dash and ruthlessness, and no brains, either; but she has an effect upon every man who comes near her. Freddy Burgoyne is crazy about her, and Bobby L'Estrange, too. Winnie is so cross! The girl interests me in some queer way; she reminds me so of Algernon, she has that downright utter want of sentiment he has. She is nineteen. Hilda Flint is taking her out; they are second cousins, so we all see a great deal of her. She does not care in the least what she says, or does, and will rattle out a *bête*, impossible thing, making every one squirm, and then she will laugh and show all her row of perfect white teeth and look so divinely lovely that no man minds. She can't keep a maid, she has such fits of temper, and Hilda says she can't speak a word of truth. She has odd tricks, too; she will abstract the sugar out of the sugar-bowls and munch it in her room. She likes it better than bonbons, which her father has forbidden her to have. I don't know why I am writing all this, Guinevere, as it can't interest you, only, for some strange reason, as I said before, she reminds me of Algernon, a glorious creature, without an atom of soul."

I sat a long time thinking over this description. Is it true, then?—has Algernon no soul? Oh, my dear boy! What am I to do for him? I am afraid to look ahead, because whatever rushing torrent he plunges into I am absolutely powerless to prevent him—so things must go on.

. . . . . .

Hugh has returned to England. He is in London. Letitia told me this immediately she knew it, but since then I have

not heard from her for over a fortnight. Humphrey also told me that Hugh had arrived; he heard it at the bench, and there are great rejoicings among his people at Minton Dremont.

"He will surely marry now and settle down," my husband said. "I suppose he was hankering after that Dalison woman—or some other—men are often d——d fools."

Oh, what a poor creature I am, that all this should give me such pain—that after almost two years again I love Hugh with the same intensity as ever, and his actions are of supreme importance to me; all my prayers for numbness and self-control have been of no avail.

I tell myself every morning that I must face whatever comes bravely, and I always pray for his happiness, my dear love—alas! no more to be my lover. But the feeling of waiting and expectancy grows and grows until sometimes at night I pace up and down from my room to the turret chamber, backward and forward, too agitated to sleep.

Letitia has written—her letter came by the first post, and before I opened it something made me know it contained eventful news. I read my other correspondence first; there was some feverish reluctance to break the seal of her envelope—but I did at last, and this is what I read:

"I am telling you something, Guinevere, so that you may not presently read news in the paper which may distress you. We have not talked of Hugh in these years, because, as your parting with him was final, there would have been no use in my keeping the flame alight by speaking of him. But I have always felt, dear, that you have not forgotten him. Your little face, Guinevere, is the saddest I know; the whole thing is a wretched pain to look back upon, and I wish I had never helped you to enjoy life. Your dignity and quiet acceptance of fate and your duty have won my deepest admiration, darling, and perhaps to you, in some way, the past has been worth while. Now I must come to the point and tell you that Hugh is changed, and while he still is awfully attractive—more so than ever, perhaps—to the general public, he seems to have lost that something which made him so dear in our happy spring-time. His face is harder and more cynical than it ever used to be, even in the old days before you altered it with your influence. And—he is infatuated with Kathleen—do you remember the girl I told you of, that Hilda is taking out?—Lord Catesby's daughter. He dined with me the first night after he arrived, and we talked of his future, and he said that Adelaide and Mrs. Forester—

Lily, his younger sister, you know—had never let him alone about marrying, and the whole situation, with Victor Dremont's son's *mésalliance,* was so hateful that he meant now to look about and find one sensible and not too young, who would leave him alone. We went on to the theatre very late, and there in a box was Kathleen, surrounded, as usual by a number of young men. I saw it in a second, she struck that side of him which has slept since Mrs. Dalison's day—the brute side—the side which, in fact, she strikes in all men. I would not introduce him in the hall coming out, and I got him to come back to supper with me alone at home; but I knew it would be no good. Once a woman has that attraction for a man, angels from heaven could not stop him. So, Guinevere, I have just sat back and watched it with disgust, Hilda giving me the private news of it all the time. The girl has been having an affair with a sweet boy in the Guards; no one knows how far it has gone or if they were secretly engaged, but the moment Hugh and his position and his wealth came on to the horizon, Hilda said she gnashed her white teeth, laughed that metallic laugh of hers, flashed her blue eyes, and said:

"'I mean to have this rich old man.'

"I am not sparing you anything, Guinevere, darling, because I want your contempt to cure the pain. Then, Hilda says, her cunning has been too wonderful. She has acted the innocent baby, cast the flashing blue eyes down demurely, made everything as difficult for Hugh as she can, and has brought him to a point when he is only waiting for the chance to propose to her. I have not heard—he may have done it already in the last three days. He has avoided me—as you can imagine—and I cannot tell him, in any case, all that I know of her; because of you, my tongue is tied. So we are all powerless, and must just watch him—our dear old friend—going over the weir. Anything more unsuitable than she will be in the rôle of a great lady at Minton Dremont you cannot imagine, or anyone in character more unsuitable to Hugh. But he is blind and deaf, of course, and only sees her white skin and her golden hair. I won't say any more, dearest. I think it is kindest, to cut straight in with a sharp knife. Pull yourself together, darling little sister, and, as ever, come up to the scratch.

"All love and sympathy from

"Your LETITIA."

I have had several terrible moments in my life, but these, the most cruel of all, produced in me for a while only a

sensation of physical cold. I shivered, and my teeth chattered. I did not seem to be able to think, or feel mental pain—and then gradually the hideous anguish came and grew intensified, until I lay in silent agony in my bed.

. . . . . .

For the first time since my illness four years ago, I was unable to go down to breakfast, and Humphrey actually came up to see me after the second post was in, which brings the London papers.

He came over and sat on the bed, and, after a casual hope that I was all right, brandished the *Times*. He had the splendid news to impart to me, he said, that Hugh Dremont was going to be married to Lady Kathleen Catesby in a few weeks.

"Isn't it a good thing, Guinevere? I knew you'd be so awfully glad, I climbed up here to tell you at once. He has been thundering quick about it; he only landed in England less than a month ago. Now they will be settled here by the autumn, and we'll have some neighbors again."

Then for a moment my husband's voice sounded afar off, and I was not sure of his words, until I saw him bending over me, and caught a rough, kindly whisper:

"I say, Guinevere, you do look pale. I think I'll send for Doctor Burnley, my dear."

CHAPTER XXIX

AUGUST, 1910

TO-DAY is Hugh's wedding day. It is full of angry showers, with a high wind—the third of August. Letitia has written to me what she thinks I ought to know about it, and nothing further. She has the family pride, and will not admit that I am crushed with pain over this, any more than I will admit to myself. The engagement was very brief—just over a month—and most of the time Lady Kathleen was in Paris getting her trousseau and Hugh was seeing to his affairs and up at Bransdale, where he has decided to rebuild the house that was burned down, a mile or two farther off from the town. Letitia, commenting upon these events, said in a letter:

"Hugh is behaving decently and like a gentleman, isn't he? He is arranging not to have to live always at Minton Dremont. But he looks defiant. I do not know if he is happy or not. He was for the first few days, I expect, while Kathleen kept up the sweetly demure rôle—but Hilda says when she felt perfectly sure of him she dropped it a little, and played again with Tommy Burleigh (the boy in the Guards), and that they, she and Hugh, had a frightful row—and that is why Hugh went off up to Bransdale, he could not cope with her, and did not wish to be tantalized. It is pitifully undignified, and simply scorches us who know him. Ada is too mordantly entertaining over it. They are all wild, as you can imagine, though they predict it won't last two years. The most curious thing about it is that there is really some mystery concerning Kathleen's mother. An awfully nice American man from Virginia took me in to dinner the other night at a party—just after the engagement was announced—and we chanced to talk of very old

families and their continuance in England, and he mentioned Hugh's—he was extremely interested in pedigrees and heredity and those things—and I said that here was a case of two very old families going to be united, as Lord Catesby's was simply a sort of thing from the ark. And his jaw dropped—and he said, absolutely flabbergasted, 'Do you mean to tell me Sir Hugh Dremont is going to marry Bella Billwood's daughter—Good Lord!'—and then, when I asked him why he was so startled, and what it all meant, he changed the conversation rapidly and would not answer that, but seemed most anxious to know when the wedding was to be. I felt frightfully interested, as you may think."

This sort of letters came and passed. Of what matter who the girl's mother was; of what matter anything on earth, for, since two o'clock this afternoon, she has been Hugh's wife, and they are now on their way to Paris to spend their honeymoon, and the bells are ringing at the church, and the flag is flying, beaten by the rain, from the flagstaff at Minton Dremont. Oh, God, be good to my Beloved, and make this woman a means to his happiness, and give me strength to live and do that which is my duty with the dignity which is due to my race.

I did not go to the wedding. I have had to act many things during these weeks of anguish, and I made all semblance of joy and interest. Of what use would my sacrifice of two years ago have been if I had, now from my own hideous suffering, betrayed the situation and again aroused suspicion in Algernon's heart? He has no illusions upon life generally, I fear, and would most certainly have drawn some undesirable inference from any sign of shrinking on my part. So I made a pretence of gladness, and talked of my dress in these three days my son has been back from Eton—and then this morning, when we were ready to start, I allowed myself to fall down the last three steps of the great stairs and feigned a wrenched ankle, and with seemingly great reluctance made the two depart for London without me—and now I am sitting alone here in my turret room—and the angry showers beat against the east window and drop in fizzing drops down the wide chimney upon the sullen logs which have just been lit. For I am again cold as death.

Do men ever suffer as women do? I think not, for they are free and can be up and doing. They can fly far from the scene of their pain, and have diversions. And their

natures are different, too; for them, the swift movement of horses and the slaying of beasts give satisfaction—or to have their ambitions excited about politics or any other combat in the arena of life. And their senses can be pleased by the beauty of women that they even do not know, and with all these interests they can heal them of their hurts. But for such as I am—who love one man only and forever, supremely and above all other things—the day he is wedded to another woman must contain all of torture there is on this earth to know.

. . . . . .

It is the day after Hugh's wedding.

I heard the carriage come into the courtyard from the station a while ago, and now there is a second sound of arrival—what can it mean? Humphrey and Algernon stayed the night in London, and were to have returned by the five-forty-two train to-day. They must be in the library—I wonder why Algernon, at least, does not come up to see me and tell me all the news. What can he be delaying for? I think I will get up from my bedroom sofa and go down and find out. My ankle does not hurt in the least, really—and I must look interested and anxious to hear. To all the neighborhood this marriage is of vital, thrilling importance, and excitement. What is that noise of whispering beyond the screen? Hartington's voice and Parton's—Ah! God, what has happened? I must see.

. . . . . .

It has overtaken us at length—the haunting terror of this house. It has caught them, these last Bohuns, in the horror of its grasp, and choked the life out of one of them——

Humphrey is dead. His death caused by passionate rage against his son.

Oh! for day and weeks, I have not been able to face the thought or realize the frightful sequence of events. Grief and horror have had the mastery of me.

And of what use now to put down all the details of how my poor Humphrey discovered in London that Algernon had been betting heavily upon all races that he could, and had lost over a thousand pounds. Or of Humphrey's furious passion in the train, which Algernon missed, leaving him to come down alone. All these things are details in a tragedy that we can never forget.

Then of how, when the boy did arrive, his father met him in the hall, and picking up a riding whip when Algernon would not answer him, went in his rage to strike him,

there just in front of the suits of armor with the visors lowered, that seem always to watch in sinister mocking the ways of the modern world. Algernon's passion rose, too, perhaps naturally, and he cried aloud:

"If you strike me, father, I warn you, I will kill you—keep away!"

But Humphrey came on, and as he raised the whip Algernon seized it madly in his strong grasp. Then that same awful convulsion overcame Humphrey, as once before when he was angry with the groom, and he staggered and fell, striking his head against the stone curb of the mantelpiece, and there lay dead upon the floor. It was then, Hartington, who had witnessed this terrible scene, rushed up to warn Parton to keep me from the cruel sight, while they sent for Doctor Burnley to know the worst.

But I cannot write of what followed, or of my son's wild, frenzied agony that held remorse as well as grief. They had not loved one another greatly in life; at least Algernon had certainly not loved his father—but to part thus forever in horrible rage! Oh, the tragedy of it! my poor boy—my poor son!

. . . . . .

The horror of the days that followed in this grim house of death—from whence Humphrey's body was carried to sleep with his ancestors in the vault of the church! I try in vain to banish it from my memory, but never can I pass the hall but my fancy seems to conjure up that great stain of blood slowly spreading from under the tall oak chair, to the feet of one of the suits of armor. It seemed so real today, that although I knew it was only a reflection from the stained-glass emblazoned window, still it was so weirdly terrible that I nearly screamed and picked up my skirt. Oh! my poor Humphrey, to die so!—how can your spirit rest in peace! How glad I am that lately we had seemed nearer to one another, and I can feel that he was more contented with me. His last words were kindly, about my fall on the stairs: I am comforted to remember that.

. . . . . .

It is October now, and the sad days pass with Algernon and Sir John Kaird and me alone. Soon we are leaving this scene of ghastly misery. But there were many things to be arranged first. Sir John is Humphrey's executor and my son's guardian, as well as his godfather, and has been often down here settling papers and carrying out instructions. Algernon will be very rich, and I also need have no

anxieties about the future as far as money is concerned—it has been lavished upon me. One sentence in Humphrey's will I can never think of without bitter tears:

"And to my dear wife I leave"—and here the sum is mentioned—"in gratitude for her unfailing obedience, patience, and devotion which I have sometimes ill repaid—that she may have peace and plenty for the rest of her natural life."

Oh! if he had ever been tender with me while he lived, my poor Humphrey, how different it all could have been!

Algernon seems very changed—the proud, stubborn spirit in him has grown sullen with his grief. He is morose and taciturn, and colder than ever to me. It would appear as though now, that the first shock is over, that he resents having shown me his innermost being, and would sear all memory of emotion between us. I have tried to move him with gentleness—I have explained that a wall grows with silence, and the sorrow that hardness brings; and for a moment, when I touch him vaguely, he will kiss me and then hurry away, and the next day resume his former manner again.

He is going to leave for Sandhurst on Thursday, and I am starting for Italy alone on Saturday morning, October the twenty-second. Redwood Moat is to be shut up for a time, perhaps until Algernon's coming of age—in two years and a half from now. In appearance, my son already looks over twenty-one, and he grows more magnificently handsome as the days go on. I am so crushed with sorrow and desolation, one grief on top of another, that life feels as though it were a gray, grim journey to be passed through quickly to an end.

The bride and bridegroom return to their home tomorrow, and there are to be rejoicings at Minton Dremont. But even this has not moved me from the dull apathy of sodden grief. I am thankful only that I shall be far away this winter, and not forced to witness Hugh's companionship with his young wife. As echoes of things come to me, no matter how aloof one may be, I have heard that the Lady Kathleen Dremont has already made a great impression upon her husband's relations, and one that they strongly dislike—but I must never allow prejudice to color my thoughts of her. I must force myself to try and think tenderly and kindly of this motherless young girl now sheltering in the arms of my Beloved.

But I cannot yet bear the sight of her in the rooms which seem sacred to me—or her flitting, beautiful form in the

gardens that contain memories for me of all sweetness and love.

. . . . . .

Letitia, in her sensible letters, has not mentioned the Dremonts. One can always count upon her feeling for the fitness of things.

. . . . . .

The Friday afternoon has come. Algernon and Sir John left yesterday on their way to Sandhurst, and I am alone this last day that I shall spend here at Redwood Moat for a long time to come. Letitia's housekeeper in Cheshire is going to keep Petrov for me during my absence from England, and my dear beast seems to know he is leaving me, and creeps over to my side.

I am sitting here in my shrine with the curtains drawn—and Parton has just brought me in some tea. Outside, the wind is howling in a slowly gathering storm; it suits the sad atmosphere of this house.

And while I sit here, as ghosts before me rise the pictures of the sequence of events—of our coming to Redwood—of my passionate longing to live before it should be too late. Of fate's immediate answer to my prayer—in the advent of Hugh—and of what this meant to me. All things clear chains of cause and effect—even to the obligation Letitia felt to help me to happiness from her former action, which had chained my life. Of Humphrey's uncontrolled tempers, and of their result in the character of his son. Of Algernon's hardness because he was created in fear and not love—and of the haunting, terrible influence of this abode of generations of strong, violent men—culminating in tragedy and yet more shadows of grim deaths to stain its floors with blood. Oh! to escape from it to another sphere—to rise into God's sky and peace forever! But I cannot—I must live to help, at least by my prayers, the headlong career of my son.

And what of Hugh, and the life which lies in front of him? Will it be for him joy and happiness? Will the years bring him this greatly-wished-for heir? Well, above and beyond all personal things, I ask God to protect and keep him—and to smooth his path so that in time he may obtain the desire of his heart.

But for me my life is over—and I am thirty-six years old.

. . . . . .

Am I dreaming—dreaming in the firelight? What is

that noise far down upon the turret stair?—the soft shutting of the garden entrance door—footsteps—mounting, mounting with never a stumble in the gloom. It must be some one who knows the way. My heart beats, but it is not in fear. Fear has no place in its numbed depths.

. . . . . .

Then the narrow door opened noiselessly, and there stood —Hugh!

CHAPTER XXX

OCTOBER, 1910

GAUNT and haggard and pitiful, my once dear, splendid lover came to me, and, stopping, leaned upon the back of the great oak chair—and there we gazed into each other's eyes with an anguish too deep for tears.

"Guinevere," he whispered hoarsely, "to-morrow you are going away, they tell me, and there are things to be spoken of between us first; so I have come to you here."

I did not answer—I had no words—I only pointed to the chair, and Hugh sank into it with a bitter sigh, and there was a long silence. Then after a while he spoke.

"It is my punishment, dear love," he groaned brokenly, clasping together his hands. "My punishment for my rebellious passions to begin with, and our punishment, Guinevere, for breaking that bond of our souls' union which should have been stronger than laws, stronger than life or death. You had no right to send me from you, dear—I was your mate and your lover, and we should have been great enough to live as priest and nun until God cleared us a path. And now the path would have been cleared, but I by my passion have erected a barrier crueller than that which stood before. Speak to me, dearest—let me hear your gentle voice once more—or I shall have no courage to go on."

"Hugh," I faltered—"my dear, dear Hugh."

"Guinevere, to no other soul on earth would I lay bare the shame and horror in my heart—listen to the awful story—and then tell me what to do."

I leaned forward in my hooded chair, fixing my eyes upon his loved, stern face—and there in the lamplight I saw that the thick, brown hair which waves back from his broad brow was streaked with gray.

"I will not go all over the time after our separation, Guine-

vere," he began. "It was the same as it had been before, only more cruel—the same heartbreaking suffering and torture—then the excitement and the sport—and often a bitter anger against fate, and then gradually rebellion and resentment against the thrall of your memory and the pain. And, as before, I crushed all tender things—they hurt the most—and I took life as it came—any distraction to deaden my passionate love for you. I had no illusions this time that I should be able to come back and be friends—I knew I had not conquered anything—I was afraid even to speak to Letitia about you—afraid to come home. Nothing was deadened, and I was in furious rebellion at my impotence and my suffering. You will have heard, of course, how I first met Kathleen—" here his voice grew deeper, and he paused, as though the words would not come. "She is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. She maddened me—that side of me which you always knew was there. Nothing really mattered any more—a crust of cynical hardness was over my soul—I only felt I would grasp that which could bring me some tangible joy, because I knew I could never conquer the wild ache for you. I would not let myself see that Kathleen was brainless and soulless and utterly untrustworthy, although I was always finding her out in lies. The other attraction was so strong. I knew she did not care a rush for me, but that did not deter me at all, I only wanted her for my own pleasure. Most women cannot understand this side of a man, or make allowances for it, but you were always greater, and realized it, Beloved. A man can worship one woman as I worship you, and yet be drawn by his senses to another if his dear one is absent—there is no use for people to argue against this, it is so, and will be to the end of time."

There was silence for a moment, and then Hugh spoke once more, and I hardly recognized his voice, so hoarse had it become.

"We were married, you know—do you remember the day it was? the rain and the raging wind—I felt intoxicated. She was more beautiful than the dawn. I only desired to be away alone with her; I had no other thought. Well, when we got back to Hilda's house in Berkeley Square, after the ceremony at the church, to change our wedding clothes—while I was dressing, Carton—you remember my servant, Carton—gave me a packet which he said had come the night before, and he was sorry he had forgotten in the excitement to give it to me—a messenger had brought it, and had said it

was imperative that I read its contents without a moment's delay—Carton could not be sorry enough, but felt I would forgive him under the circumstances. It was all sealed, and looked an ominous thing enough. I do not know why I did not pitch it into my dressing bag, as most men would have done at such a time. But this was fate again. I opened it, and as the first words caught my eye, I stiffened; and then I read on. I won't go into it all, Guinevere, but just tell you it was an attested set of documents, proving that my beautiful bride was an eighth part—black—Oh! God! the agony, the horror, the disgust of that moment—I—cannot tell you of it, Guinevere. Suddenly, tricks of movement came back to me—the flashing of her eyes—her hands—her too curly, golden hair. All the passion went out of me, and a frightful revulsion took its place. The sender of these documents went on to say, being a deep student of evolution and heredity, and a Southerner of fine old family himself, he felt that it was his duty to apprize me of these facts in time, and it was only that minute he had been able to get the necessary documents together from America—as he felt he could not tell me all this without proof. He said he knew how one Southern gentleman would feel to another about such a thing, and if I, being an Englishman, did not share his feelings, then no harm would have been done—but that if I did, then he was thankful to say he had been able to warn me just *in time*. Oh, Guinevere—*in time!*"

Hugh groaned with bitterness as he repeated over the words—"in time!"

I cannot say what were the feelings which came rushing through me—of horror and sympathy and pain.

He pulled himself together sternly and went on more rapidly now:

"I had just come from America, Guinevere, and the South—and I knew and understood the sentiment they have about such things there—and the writer of the letter had signed his name, it was no anonymous correspondent—it was a name which I knew, and which was respected and honored in his town. I have always had this feeling myself about niggers and a strong physical repulsion as well. And to think that one whose great-grandmother was a full black was now my wife, and if the marriage went on, in a year or so might be the mother of my son. It drove me perfectly mad, Guinevere. I reeled with the sickening irony of it all. And then I made up my mind—I would be ruthless—for no law or no other reason would I ever make this woman my

wife in anything but name. It would not be justice to leave her now practically at the church door and create a great scandal, but I would tell her the whole truth the moment we were alone and leave it to her to settle what she would do. I naturally was under every obligation to be kind and good to her since it was not her fault, but with her father I would have a reckoning."

I started to my feet—the story was so terrible, so ghastly in its hideous details, I felt I must move or I should cry aloud. Hugh looked at me with wild, sad eyes, and then he said pitifully:

"Ah, Guinevere, I have filled you with contempt and loathing, and no wonder; but nothing you can say to me can hurt more than my own thoughts—for I had brought it all upon myself by passion—not caring any more about a soul."

"Oh, my dear," I faltered, and I came nearer to him and sat down on the oak seat, "I am not filled with anything but grief for you, and sympathy—how should I blame you?—I am not your judge."

He covered his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out some hateful picture—and then he went on as though to make a speedy end:

"Well, I told her as she faced me there in the saloon carriage, and throwing herself back on the cushions, she laughed—yes, she laughed! Ah, if you could have heard it, Guinevere—it was as the mocking of a fiend. She said she was glad—enchanted I had come to this determination—and grateful to her old nigger grandmother, if she had been the cause. Her father had always told her not to mention this thing or she might never get a husband, but that now she had secured a great position she was glad I knew, as she had never cared a rush for me and meant to enjoy her own life, which she was very well able to do. As long as I would give her lots of money and freedom, she would not have a word to say against the bargain—it was one she liked.

"And thus we started on our honeymoon!

"As she sat there opposite me in the train, it seemed as though her golden hair turned back to wool, and her glorious blue eyes grew jet, her full perfect lips became blubber, and her dazzling skin black—Guinevere, I could see the nigger in her—exact—startling—terrible—and a frightful repulsion came—over me, so that I could not have touched even her gloved hand."

He got up and stood by the wide-open grate, and he threw

out his arms with a despairing gesture, and then dropped them hopelessly at his side.

"And two days after, I heard in Paris of the General's death—Ah! God—that was the worst of all—the hideous, fiendish mockery of the whole thing caused by my own fault—I cannot tell you what the agony was then. And ever since your face and your tenderness and your sweetness have haunted me night and day with frightful stabs of pain to know that soon, but for my action, you could have been my own . And now we have come back here to Minton Dremont—to *our* house, Guinevere, and she wants to change it all. And everything that attracted me in her once fills me all the time with loathing, and I can only see her faults—Guinevere—sometimes I feel I shall go mad—and I hardly know what to do, and it must go on and on until we either of us die, or until I can divorce her or she me. A ghastly shame and torture and disgrace."

I could not speak—for a moment the misery of it silenced my utterance, and then I tried to comfort him; but it seemed as if no words were there.

"I had to come and tell you, Guinevere—and to ask you for your prayers," he pleaded. "You are not a brute and a sinner like I am—give me your prayers."

Then I came and stood beside him, and, reaching up, I touched his hair.

"Hugh," I whispered gently, "go straight on and do your duty in every way you can. Try to abstract yourself and create interests of your own. Your new house at Bransdale—the hunting—politics—the country—things for England—Hugh, do not let me have the pain of knowing that grief and horror are degrading you. Dear one, rise—rise out of this abyss of shame."

He took my face in both his hands and looked deeply into my eyes.

"Guinevere," he said, with infinite tenderness and reverence, "I have not asked you if you love me still, because I know you are too pure and too true ever to have changed. You have suffered the anguish of our severance with dignity and resignation, and I have borne it like a brute and not a man—I am not worthy to tie your shoestrings, beloved angel one—but my soul and my real worship have never wandered from you. I have only been unfaithful to you in those things which make the difference between the natures of a woman and a man. And now I realize once more how little they all matter when weighed in the balance with such love as is and

must be forever between you and me. I will not plead for mercy or forgiveness, beloved heart, because I know you understand."

Then he dropped his hands, and, taking my right one in his, he raised it to his lips.

"Guinevere—when we meet again—as time goes on—I will try to show you that I am following your wishes, but now I am glad you are going away and that I shall not see you —for all the love that I have ever had for you is there as ever—and a mighty rush of passionate worship and reverence as well. Good-bye, my Soul—and give me your prayers."

He kissed my hand once more, and left me then; and, without looking back, went down the stairs into the darkness out of which he had come.

I sat listening to the last echo of his footsteps while I stared into the fire. But, as it was when he came and we had looked into each other's eyes—mine were still dry with an anguish too deep for tears.

CHAPTER XXXI

FEBRUARY, 1912

I WANDERED in Italy for nearly thirteen months—leaving the care of Algernon to Sir John. He knows of all his tastes and tendencies, and is a dear and kindly old man of the world, and seemed a more capable guardian, and more likely to have an influence over my son, than I could hope to obtain. Sir John himself suggested this.

"Leave him to me, Lady Bohun," he wrote, when I proposed returning to be with Algernon at Christmas time, "he can come and hunt down at my place and stay with the Morvaines. He is so very restive and masterful, you could not do anything with him; but the point of view of others about him is our only chance. I'll see that he does not get into any mischief."

So I stayed on—but about last November, just over a year after I went away, I felt that something was being kept from me, and at length it came out. Algernon had refused any longer to stay at Sandhurst. He announced his intention of giving up the idea of being a soldier—and nothing any one could say had any effect upon him. Even if he went into the Guards, he argued, their leave was short, and they had to work hard—and as there were only one or two things he cared for, which was to hunt all the winter and play cricket and race all the summer, he was not going to be restricted in any way by a fixed career. He intended to return to Redwood Moat for Christmas, and be master there, and hunt for the rest of the season. He explained, with relentless calmness, that if Sir John would not provide him with the necessary money, he could easily obtain it from the Jews, who had already accommodated him with a few small loans.

His guardian reasoned and implored, and tried to shame him into changing his resolution, but apparently he sat there in Sir John's rooms, smoking a cigarette, perfectly unmoved. So, at last, the dear old man wrote to me.

"I fear there is nothing to be done, my dear friend. I can only counsel you to come back and keep house for him, and by your gentle influence do what you are able. I find to agree to what he demands, and then ask him to take things in moderation, is the only possible way. He is so hard-headed and—forgive my saying it—so utterly selfish, that he will never come to hopeless grief about his money. I have agreed to four hunters, and if you will open the house and get some young people round him, I think that is all we can do."

So now, in February, we have been for a month installed. It seems so strange to be here at Redwood Moat again without Humphrey; it has renewed a gentle grief. My wanderings in the southern lands have brought peace and quiet to my heart—and I have been well in health, and Letitia says I have grown young again.

Of Hugh I often think—and try that it shall be tenderly and lovingly, as of some one who is dead and gone—but underneath there is always the fear that when I see him, I shall find that my emotions are unchanged. I have not fought against the mastery of my love for him. I have left it there in my heart. Only the months of peace have given me an outward control, and I shall endeavor to have pride enough to bear all things without showing anything of what I may have to suffer.

Sir Hugh and Lady Kathleen Dremont are coming back from Egypt now until the season begins, and they mean to hunt, the neighborhood says—and many tales have been poured into my unwilling ears of how they are seldom together, and of her bad manners and bad temper—and of the irritation and worry she is to him. She won't be made to do any of her county duties, which are irksome to her, and flies off to Paris the moment she is bored. Her father, Lord Catesby, comes to Minton Dremont to stay with them often, almost whenever they are there, and is with them generally, in fact; so I suppose Hugh had the reckoning with him and insists upon this that he may have some one to be always with Kathleen. It is reported that Lord Catesby remonstrates with his daughter and endeavors to make things go more smoothly along, but whatever she may do, "Sir Hugh," bears it all patiently, and has "never been known to give her

a cross word." So the neighborhood gossips, with other whispered hints of their relations together—and lamentations that there will be no prospect of an heir.

And now, any day, I may see Hugh again, and I must be prepared.

. . . . . .

Algernon came into the drawing-room just now from hunting, while I was having tea. They had had a bad day, I knew by his having sent home his second horse unused—and I expected him to be morose, as he often is when things are not exactly as he wishes—but, to my surprise, he looked radiant and so superbly good-looking, I was impelled to go up and kiss him, a pleasure I rarely allow myself, he dislikes all caresses so much. He looks two- or three-and-twenty now, with a little dark moustache, and his tall, splendid, athletic figure would make any mother's heart proud.

"You know, mum," he remarked, munching his brown bread and butter, "old Hugh and his lady were out to-day, and she's the most stunning piece of goods you'd see in a month of Sundays, far better-looking than even she was at the wedding. By Jove, mum, you will be struck when you see her—she is jolly, too, and no end friendly. They only arrived last night, and she insisted upon coming out at once—and her hunter was full of monkey tricks, but she rode him like a bird."

"That is splendid," I returned, with sympathy. "How fortunate that they both should like hunting—I will go and call—immediately."

"It's not necessary—old Hugh was so awfully glad to see me," Algernon interrupted, "and Lady Kathleen said, wouldn't I persuade you to come to lunch to-morrow and not stand on ceremony, as the family are such old friends; and I said I was sure you would."

So to-morrow I shall see Hugh with his wife—in the rooms I love at Minton Dremont.

. . . . . .

"Oh! the pain of it! How can I go on bearing such days as to-day has been?

Lady Kathleen and Lord Catesby were in the morning-room when Algernon and I arrived at Minton Dremont. It is quite altered since the new mistress reigned there. The bright chintzes have gone, and a fresh arrangement of odd colors and a black carpet have taken their place.

She looked hard at me as we shook hands, but was polite enough.

No description of her beauty has been exaggerated; she is a perfect goddess of health and exuberant youth, while her coloring is too wonderful. But with the knowledge of her parentage the whole thing for me is tainted and spoiled, for even I who have never been in the land where these blacks abound, now that I know of its existence, can see the trace of their blood in her. And as I looked in honest admiration of her beauty, I was conscious of a thrill of repulsion. I can understand thoroughly, though, how she attracted Hugh; she would attract any man. I tried my very utmost not to let prejudice affect my judgment of her—but the hard metallic brilliancy of her glorious eyes seemed to freeze me.

She was perfectly nonchalant and agreeable, with an air of being complete mistress of the place and the situation.

Then the door opened and Hugh come into the room and we shook hands. His dear face wore a mask, but I could see the gleam of pain in his eyes when for an instant they met mine.

All my hard-won calm deserted me. I felt as though I could have screamed—cried aloud in my misery and wretchedness—and as we went in to luncheon, a mad revolt at circumstances overcame me, so that I trembled.

Oh! the puppets we seem in fate's hand!

All the deep passion which has been repressed by these years of control of myself seemed to burst its bonds. I surged with furious emotion.

Here was this young woman mistress of this house; even though her presence is nothing but a punishment to its master. She has the right to change the chintzes, and to sit at the head of the table and give orders; and Hugh and I, who were made for one another, must dissemble and meet as cold strangers and suffer pain.

For the first time in my life I felt that hate and rage had the ruling of me, and only the breeding that is in me enforced an appearance of natural outward behavior. The food choked me, the wine burnt my throat, and every turn of Kathleen's head and sound of her voice was a gall to me.

Hugh's demeanor was restrained. He was icily polite to his wife and his father-in-law, with a forced geniality to Algernon and me—but I, who know every line of his beloved face and every look in his eyes, saw that there was written in them a hopeless abiding tragedy.

He announced that he was going off to Bransdale immediately, as his presence there was very necessary now that the critical stage of the house's completion had begun.

Kathleen wished to hunt, he remarked, so would remain on at Minton Dremont, her father keeping her company.

"Yes," she said, "Hugh seems to hate being here, but I like it and don't mean ever to go to that horrid old Bransdale at all. I am having some of the garden changed, and it is such fun for me. I like upsetting things that were, and having everything new," and she laughed a mocking laugh—then, turning to Algernon with a radiant flash of her eyes:

"You must give me leads out hunting, Mr. Bohun. You love dashing about, too, I saw yesterday. I am sick of all the old people and their staid ways."

And as she spoke I remembered my own feelings long ago, and how restrictions had fretted me—and my rage calmed a little. She may be an unworthy character, but she is young and living and blooming, and has a right to her life.

She smokes cigarettes all the time; she began one before we had hardly tasted the fruit. Hugh used always be so glad that I did not care for it—he used to say there was no use going against the tide of custom, but he preferred that I should not smoke. Now he did not seem to remark what his wife did or did not do. A weary, blank indifference was in his mien—he never even noticed the frank and unconcealed admiration on Algernon's face or the interest and excitement in his manner—though as the meal went on it was so evident that when I realized what it must indicate in comparison to his general unconcern about women, I felt suddenly sick and cold. This would be the culmination of the situation of misery and horror if my son should fall seriously in love with Kathleen. After lunch Hugh left us with a casual good-bye—he must ride into Wareford, he said—and Algernon and our hostess going off to the stables to see her new hunters, I was left with Lord Catesby alone. He is an old bore with an uneasy manner, and after a few minutes I asked for the motor and left; and when I got back to Redwood the house seemed to stifle me, so I wandered out again into the park and on into Corlston Chase, and there paced and paced among the bare trees until it grew dusk, every frenzied passion surging in my heart.

It had seemed possible to part from my love and counsel him to do his duty there in the turret room a year and four months ago, when we were both overcome and oppressed with blank misery and hopelessness—but now with the actual evidences of the barrier between us before our eyes,

and the certainty of meeting like this in the intercourse of our two families and having to act, it is not to be borne. And yet what is to be done?—I must stay with Algernon here at least until he becomes of age.

I felt out there in the February dusk as though I understood now what Hugh had suffered at Cowes the night he threw prudence to the winds and made me go with him on board the *Hermione*.

Once or twice a paroxysm of furious rebellion overcame me, so that I stamped my feet and my hands smashed in pieces a dry stick I had picked up from the hedge. All the restrictions of civilization seemed to fall from me. I was back at the bed-rock of primitive passion. And then it began to rain—steady, soaking rain—and at last I came back to this my home, worn out and subdued once more, but with a hideous foreboding and unhappiness in my heart that I am powerless to remove.

And now I am waiting for my son's return from Minton Dremont; there is no sign of him as yet, and it is past six o'clock.

. . . . . .

Weeks have gone by and once more the presage of some terrible trouble hangs over this unfortunate house of Redwood Moat.

Algernon is passionately in love with Kathleen. All this time she has played with him, and the horror of the situation has been creeping over me with augmenting force, so that my own personal anguish subsides into a lesser trouble.

Hught went off to Bransdale immediately after the day at luncheon, and has not returned since except for flying visits.

He played his part nobly during the time I was abroad, and I heard of him when I first came back as having fulfilled all his duties with that generous exactness which made him so beloved in the county of old. But now, like me, perhaps, he cannot any longer bear things and keeps away.

Kathleen has always had numbers of adorers, but her methods with them have all been so ruthless and careless that as yet no actual scandal has connected any one of them with her name.

But Algernon is different to the rest. His indomitable will and his extraordinary personal beauty, added to the prestige of his completely fearless riding, give him a special attraction, and I know and feel that Kathleen is no longer indifferent to him. A fearful terror is upon me.

What they do out hunting I cannot say actually; she follows where he leads, I believe—with a recklessness that is the wonder and admiration of the whole field. And what happens when he goes to tea with her in the late afternoons on non-hunting days I can only guess. Her father is there always, and frequently other visitors. I judge by Algernon's temper when he returns if he has or has not been able to see her alone.

Of all the tragedies which have beset my life, the tragedy of the thought of what this may mean is the greatest.

If Hugh should ever know! If there should be some scandal—Oh; I cannot face the frightful possibility of it all.

To see the two together, Algernon and Kathleen, almost makes one hold one's breath, they are so perfectly beautiful, and they have all the same tastes and likings. Both despise books and music and all gentle things. Neither, it would seem, has a belief or an aspiration beyond the present moment and the pleasure of the day. Of sentiment they do not know the outside meaning, or of tenderness either. Yes, I must face it—they are mates in their own way, just as were my dear lover and I. But mates, like brute beasts, might be in their lair—made to be happy together were it not for fate's bars.

What ought I to do—Ah! God in heaven—direct me—what ought I to do?

. . . . . .

It is the last day of the hunting, and Kathleen rode into the courtyard on their way home with my son.

Lord Catesby, who had been out with them, had gone on, and Algernon brought Kathleen up to the drawing-room. I was in my turret room playing the piano to soothe my troubled soul, and did not know they were there until I went down through the little library to pour out the tea. These doors open noiselessly now, and I heard, before I could make my presence known, Algernon's voice, hoarse and muffled with passion, saying:

"If you dare to dance with or speak to Tommy Burleigh at the races, I'll kill you, I tell you—I will choke the life out of you both—you belong to me and only me, and shall not even play with any other man."

I reeled against the book-covered wall, and then silently retreated again up the stairs—and there, in my shrine with my old Petrov sleeping peacefully, I sat down upon the west window-seat and looked out at the setting sun—red as blood

as it sank toward the horizon, in a lurid, angry sky.

What could this mean? Only one thing—Algernon would never dare to speak so to her if she had not given him the right to do so. He is, at least, a gentleman, and in society has now quite courtly manners, just as his father had. Is he, then, this beautiful creature's lover? Oh—Alas, my son, my son—

For an hour or more, I sat stricken with horror and grief, clutching the old silk curtains. The relentless, inexorable Nemesis which hangs over this house and this Bohun family is here with its awful shadow again.

And Hugh and I broke the law—and these two are breaking the law; this is our hideous punishment, and the price is not yet paid.

The last rays of the sun seemed to flood the sky with blood, and heavy purple clouds were gathering in promise of coming storm.

But I could arrive at no resolution as to what would be the best to do. I could not even decide to consult Sir John, who next week would be coming for the races and the usual hunt ball.

Hugh has returned, sometimes for a Saturday to Monday—but I have never seen him except in church—and his face, as he has passed in or out, has been stern with a blank, weary indifference that hardly seems to take in the surroundings or remark events. And when most rarely his eyes have met mine, he has averted them instantly, and I have seen the listlessness replaced by a quiver of pain.

But he will be at Minton Dremont for the whole week of the races. Oh! God, what shall I do—what shall I do?—if he should see or notice anything between Algernon and Kathleen?

. . . . . .

The races are over and the ball. I did not go to either, because I am still in mourning—but the house was full of guests—Lord Burbridge and more of Algernon's friends, and some Bohun girl cousins and Sir John—and my dear Letitia and Langthorpe, and his nephew, Henry Germaine.

But I felt I could not even tell Letitia of my troubles—from me no living being shall ever know of this awful thing.

Nothing happened to cause any scandal. Adelaide and little Adela were there, at Minton Dremont. Adela is now seventeen, and they were more or less of a family party, and Letitia tells me she hears from the Essendens and the people

at Mitley, that on those occasions Lord Catesby watches over his daughter, and gets her to behave with much greater circumspection than usual. It seems to be generally known now in the county that the marriage is a completely empty thing, and a failure in all ways—and great is the head-shaking and shoulder-shrugging in consequence.

Letitia said, to see the two—Algernon and Kathleen—dancing one of these rather wild, new dances together, was one of the most beautiful sights she had ever witnessed. A specimen pair of glorious young animals, she described them as looking; and they must be very clever, for even she has not the slightest suspicion that there is anything more between them than just the joy of life and the pleasures of their age. Cunning, I have heard, is one of those black people's attributes—perhaps it has descended to Kathleen.

Lord Burbridge and Algernon are now going off to the Mediterranean for motor-boat racing. I hate the idea of the danger, but anything is acceptable to get my son away—and all I can do is to sit still and wait events.

CHAPTER XXXII

JULY, 1912

I AM living with Damocles' sword suspended over my head, which any moment may fall.

Algernon stayed abroad for a whole month, perfectly indifferent to any suggestions from Sir John or myself. He has a motor-boat of his own now, and it provides him with a pleasurable excitement. He obtained it from his guardian by his usual threat of going to the Jews. He will not be twenty-one until next March, though he is in every way emancipated and a man of the world.

But whatever he does seems of lesser importance than his staying at home to follow after Kathleen.

They met in Paris on his way back, where she had gone for her clothes, but Lady Hilda Flint was with her, so I suppose the young pair were very careful. The whole situation is so ghastly and appalling, I think, if Hugh knew, he would kill himself, because of the frightful point of Algernon's being my son. It must often have come to him that such a case would be more than likely to happen. But what he thinks now I do not know. He is so hopeless and so desperately unhappy; he spends his time in ceaseless work at Bransdale. Letitia, whom I saw last week, is full of wonderment and concern at the whole thing. That something happened between Hugh and his wife after the marriage she feels sure, but what she does not know, and I have never told her of Hugh's coming to me; and I have tried never to mention the subject of the pair, except in casual sentences sometimes and general terms.

"I believe there has never been any marriage between them at all, Guinevere," Letitia said. "Hugh has a look of positive loathing for Kathleen upon his face sometimes.

Lord Catesby watches over the poor girl to such an extent that she has not the chance to get into mischief—but what they both expect will eventually happen one cannot guess. Is it likely such a creature as she will go on long without a lover! Whatever there is between them it is abominably hard on her, I think. It is said Hugh has agreed that the moment she really fancies any one he will let her divorce him, but I expect Lord Catesby is trying to avert that, as he has not a penny and Hugh is so rich."

This aspect of the case does not bring me any comfort—it rather adds to the frightful horror of the thing.

"I hate to talk about them at all, Letitia," I told her, and she understood at once and turned the subject; but I gathered that Hugh's old friends are still hoping that they will get him back into the fold some day, and with cynical patience they await what they predict will be the turn of the tide. And meanwhile the Juggernaut car of fate rolls on.

Directly after his return to England at the beginning of June, mercifully my son sprained his ankle very badly, and I stayed with him for nearly a month at Redwood Moat, when he was unable to move, and his restlessness and his temper were like Humphrey over again.

Nothing of the sweet tendernesss of lovers' intercourse seems to be between himself and Kathleen. Letters do not appear any solace to them. I gathered from his conversation during the time he was obliged to be upon the sofa that all those things are for him of no meaning. But every Saturday to Monday during the time he was laid up Minton Dremont saw its mistress. It gives me such pain now to see all her alterations there that to have to enter the house is a *supplice* which I endure as rarely as I can. And to have to go into Hugh's sitting-room or his yew-surrounded garden would be an anguish which I would not bear.

Kathleen came over to Redwood each Sunday, on one pretext or another, and sat with Algernon in the downstairs library, where he spent his time, and after the first one I got Sir John to come down, and left him unconsciously to watch over them and make a third; I could not do it, knowing what I know.

On the first Sunday in July, when Algernon was quite well again, and had announced his intention of going up to London to see the Eton and Harrow match, Kathleen and her father came down once more to Minton Dremont. They asked us to lunch, and I could give no excuse, so we went after church. Lord Catesby detained Algernon in the dining-

room when the meal was over, and I was left with Kathleen alone.

She has always plainly shown me that she thinks me a bore, so, in a sort of stiff neutrality, we always pass the moments we have ever to be together. Once the thought that I would appeal to her to give Algernon up came to me, on the plea that he is such a boy, but I dismissed it instantly, because to appeal to such a character about anything would be useless.

This Sunday the usual ordinary remarks were passing between us, when she suddenly laughed—in just the same way that she must have laughed to Hugh in the train—the sound of it made me wince. And then she looked with insolent defiance into my face. She was standing there before the tall mantelpiece in the saloon and looked wonderfully beautiful.

"You make a charming photograph, Lady Bohun," she remarked, knocking the ash off of her cigarette with her little finger. "I think it is always best to know all about the people one has to live with, and I have taken care to know all about—my husband"—and she laughed again—"my precious Hugh! He has got a safe in his room, but I have had plenty of opportunity to have a key for it made for myself, like Bluebeard's wife, to amuse myself during his long absences by looking at what is inside—and by far the most interesting things are your photographs. The one lying on his sitting-room sofa is sweetly intimate, and I am sure he values it enormously. There are no letters—that would be too dramatic—but the photographs tell their tale. You must have known him awfully well in those days, to be photographed so in his room—did you not, dear Lady Bohun?"

I am thankful for the years of forced outward control which I have gone through; they enabled me now to answer her without moving a muscle or the least faltering of tone.

"Yes, we have always known your husband very intimately. I am so glad he has kept those old photographs—I would love to see them again; they would remind me of happy days long ago."

She looked at me with insolent meaning, but I met her eyes in perfect calm; then she laughed again.

"I just thought I'd tell you—to give you a hint that I do not think you have much right to prevent my seeing Algernon, which I have noticed you seem inclined to do—and also to warn you that I mean to do exactly what I please with

him. Only he is such a darling brute"—and here she laughed again—"that it is generally he who does what he pleases with me."

"I do not understand at all about what you are talking, Lady Kathleen," I said, with continued calm. "I am very stupid, and do not grasp quickly certain forms of joke. But if what you say is meant as an expression of interest in us, and friendly affection for my son, I am very pleased. There are so few young people in this neighborhood, I am sure your companionship is a great boon to him."

She looked at me, the insolence dying out of her face—and then she laughed once more, but this time there was a note of discomfort in her merriment.

And, at that moment, Algernon and Lord Catesby opened the door and entered the room.

I did not permit myself to show the smallest disturbance or—when Lord Catesby suggested it—reluctance to be shown the perfection of the roses in the new rose garden.

"A caprice of my daughter's to have it instead of the herbaceous borders that used to be here," the old gentleman announced to me, as we walked along the familiar paths, where the best of Hugh's and my arrangings and plantings had been.

I made myself converse amiably, and then, after a suitable time had elapsed, I departed for home, leaving my son and my hostess lying in two comfortable hammocks under the cedar tree on the lawn, with lemon squashes between them and a packet of cigarettes.

And now, when I came here to my turret room once again, my knees suddenly gave way beneath me, and I fell before the east window with an agonized cry to God to deliver us all from this awful situation, to avert this ghastly tragedy from falling upon these our two homes—and to bring us out of these troubled waters into peace. I prayed aloud with a more passionate intensity than I have ever done before, my prayer wrenched from my tortured heart. And far away, in the distance, it seemed as though a low rumble of thunder answered me.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AUGUST, 1912

We are here at Cowes again. The second year we had the *Guinevere* we did not come for the Regatta week, but ran over to France instead, so my memories of the Gardens and the whole social aspect of the place are of those days four years ago, when I parted from Hugh.

Langthorpe has taken a yacht this summer, and Algernon and I are with him and Letitia, and a couple of agreeable young men, his nephew, Henry Germaine, and Freddy Burgoyne. Algernon spends his time rushing about in his motor-boat. He is perfectly reckless, and goes at top speed whenever he can. I do not allow myself to give way to the anxiety this causes me.

Letitia says he is the most gorgeously beautiful specimen of human youth there can be in England, and that every woman who looks at him is moved in some way. When nothing crosses him his manners are now charming also, and I perfectly understand Kathleen's infatuation for him. She is so hard and devoid of sentiment herself, she does not miss it in him. He has her in complete subjection, and I believe he would actually beat her if she disobeyed him or made him jealous! They are two primitive savages together. She is here on the *Hermione* with her father, and we see them constantly, and in the close intimacy of yachts, I cannot help observing things. How the situation escapes the notice of the rest of the party is a marvel to me. The hours are a nightmare, and this afternoon Hugh arrives for the week, and it will be absolutely impossible, I fear, for him not to perceive something of the case, only there is so little tenderness between Algernon and Kathleen. They seem to tease one another and chaff and not particularly desire to be

alone, except they will go off sometimes in an electric launch Algernon has hired, and spend the whole afternoon landed somewhere by themselves. They say it is to play golf on one of the island courses. Sometimes I tell myself that without the key of what I know I should never suspect anything beyond a boy and girl friendship and a similarity of tastes.

Letitia never having mentioned the subject comforts me. Surely she would have done so if she had remarked anything. She has often spoken of the modern young people's ways in the abstract.

"They do not know what we mean by love, Guinevere; I believe, as an emotion, it has quite died out. I don't think they ever talk of tender things when they are alone. When they have finished exchanging views about golf and tennis, or whatever game they play, they seem to want to rush out and begin it actively again. Their conversation is of a vapidity which is almost incredible to listen to. They are absolutely casual together. 'Johnny' treats 'Milly' as another boy, shows her little more consideration, and only seems to desire her companionship for his games. All the mystery and the joyous little pretences we indulged in are completely *vieux jeux*. I believe personally the sex instinct is dying out also, killed by the unrestrained familiarity of their intercourse. It is only kept alive by the pretty chorus girls who have realized the value of a few gentle arts of enticement."

What does Letitia think about Algernon and Kathleen? I do not know.

My mind is in chaos and I cannot sleep sometimes for the awful dread.

Letitia and I and Langthorpe were having tea in the gardens this afternoon, at the corner where the grass suddenly slopes down to the hedge near the tent, at the outside fringe of the crowd, when Hugh came from the Club-house and joined us. He had just arrived. I was conscious of his approach, though I was sitting sideways to him, and a profound emotion came over me. How are we to live in the same neighborhood, if this is going to happen always at the sight of him? He is certainly older-looking—he is forty-three now, but his charm is as great as ever. Letitia says it has augmented because of his complete indifference and aloofness. And even among this company of distinguished-looking Englishmen he stands out with a *cachet* of his own, more so than ever with the gray in his hair.

His perfect manners covered the *gêne* of our meeting,

and he took a basket-chair and sent a waiter for some more tea. Then he began to talk to Letitia. Bransdale was almost finished and would be a comfortable house in time, he told her. "It is only fair that I should spend half the year there now," he said, "as I have spent so much of my life already at Minton Dremont."

And then he asked, not addressing any of us especially: "Where is Algernon?"

"Up in the waterplane, or out in that terror of a motor-boat of his," laughed Langthorpe. "Algernon is a dasher at all things. Glad he has not entrapped Henry into his tastes; the pace he drives that boat at is not safe, and Guinevere here can't do anything with him."

"He is a gallant fellow," Hugh returned, "and a character. It is an awful pity he would not stick to being a soldier; he would have made a splendid one."

"If there had been even any distant prospect of a war, he would have," I interposed timidly. I had to defend my son. "But he must always do what he pleases, and could not have stood the routine in time of peace."

Hugh turned and glanced at me, and then instantly averted his eyes. I knew it was paining him even to see me, and I was grateful that he looked away.

The mockery of the whole thing! There we sat amidst this gay, light-hearted throng, chatting merrily as they drank their tea and listened to the band, with a background of the yachts at anchor in the gray, rough water. But the sky seemed in tune with my thoughts, so stormy and cloud-covered it appeared.

Presently some new arrivals came towards my sister and brother-in-law, and they rose to speak to them, sitting down with them a pace or two off, and Hugh and I were momentarily left alone.

"Guinevere," he said very low, after a little silence, "it is torture and hell for me to see you like this. Nothing is changed in the least. I love you more madly than ever. I came down here because, after this week, I am going away again into the wilds, and I thought it would look better to be seen once more casually in civilization. I have tried to do as you told me, but it is a failure. I cannot get through the aching days with the knowledge that you are near and I may not be with you. I cannot any longer bear my life."

"Nor I mine, Hugh," I answered miserably. "I shall be glad when you are gone. I thought we were both strong last time when you came to see me in my turret room, and indeed

I prayed for you—and myself. But it is all of no use, and so it is better for you to go."

Hugh stretched out his long legs and leaned back in his chair, looking straight in front of him.

"I shall stay away until Kathleen has the marriage annulled. She can under the circumstances, for desertion, I suppose. It is appallingly hard luck upon her to be tied to me, and if she should ever fancy some one else, I want to make it easy for her to get rid of me."

I grew cold as he spoke. If he only knew that Kathleen had already "fancied" some one else, and that it is—Algernon! And that fact, when it is known, will turn the barrier that is now between himself and me into one that nothing can ever break down again in this world.

He saw my face growing whiter, I suppose, for he said anxiously:

"Guinevere, what is it? Is something changed, then, and you do not any longer care so much for me?"

"No, Hugh," I answered. "Nothing is changed, nor can I ever alter what I feel for you. It is just the cruelty of the situation which weighs upon me unbearably."

"Darling," he gasped, and then went on more evenly: "I want to talk to you in peace just for this one afternoon. Come down through the little door there on towards the Green. We will say aloud to Letitia that we are going to see the waterplanes, and we will walk on right to the end of the parade, where there will not be a soul. Guinevere, do not refuse me this—there are so many things I want to say before I go."

I rose immediately and we joined Letitia's group indifferently, where Hugh made his announcement; and then we strolled down and out of the narrow door on to the seawall, and so to the parade.

We hardly spoke while we were among the crowd of tourists and sightseers, all coming or going toward the sheds of the waterplanes, and then presently we got beyond all that were practically alone.

"You know she has altered most of our garden, darling," Hugh said. "It hurt frightfully, but I have made it a rule not to curtail or interfere with any of her wishes. She bargained for money and freedom, and she has had both. Hardly anything remains of the actual things we planted together, you and I, Guinevere, except the vines—the grapes on it are splendid, as I told you they would be."

"I know it all scorches, Hugh," I faltered, "but in the big

pain the smaller ones are swallowed up; we must try not to feel the lesser hurts any longer."

He looked down at me so tenderly, his dear blue eyes seeking mine for comfort as one who is starving from long abstinence, and then he spoke again:

"When I sit alone in my sitting-room in the evenings—she never enters there, thank God!—I seem to realize more clearly than ever how perfect you were, dear love. All your understanding of me—your indulgence towards my selfishness, your sympathy, your comprehension, your untiring thought for me and your devotion. How I ordered you about! And how utterly sweet and always loving you were. Ah! there is no other woman so gentle and tender in the world, Guinevere. You never once crossed my wishes or were anything but fond and submissive, with that submission which seems as though it were lavishing that which its own self desires to give. I sit there in the big leather chair and think of it all. Do you remember you sat in it sometimes, Beloved One, and I sat by your knees on the low seat and you stroked my hair? And often I seem to feel with a quiver the touch of your soft fingers, and it stabs afresh my heart. We always talked then of the tenderest, most beautiful things, darling, drinking in each other's souls there in the firelight. Ah, Guinevere! Then one day comes back especially to my memory—do you remember? I had had a fall, trying the new bay horse over a hurle, and my forehead ached for a litlte, and I lay upon the sofa and you sat at the end of it, and let me rest my head on your sweet bosom while you caressed and petted me, kissing all the pain away and saying I was your baby. Guinevere, when I think of all those things and the blank desolation there is now, I almost cry aloud in anguish. And sometimes I look at the book-shelves—I can see the very book we had been getting out that afternoon when I kissed you passionately and awoke you to the knowledge that the imperative necessity had gone. Every volume almost is filled with memories of you and your love and understanding. Rossetti's Sonnets I dare not touch—they cause me such infinite pain."

Here he looked away out to the melancholy gray sea, and his lips quivered as he spoke again.

"There is not an inch of the whole room, Guinevere, that is not sacred to you and saturated with tender recollections. And in spite of the pain, it is my one consolation to sit there and dream—dream as I used to do long ago of what

it would be if you were there always, my loved and worshipped wife—with the thought that we could grow old together, hand in hand, never to part any more." His voice grew hoarse with emotion, and he paused, and then went on:

"I have grown to know that nothing else can really matter much when a man has passed forty. His ambitions are either satisfied or worn out; his face is toward the sunset, not the meridian, and all other things turn to Dead Sea fruit but the companionship of the woman he loves, when she is his real mate, evenly balanced in body and soul; then that is the only abiding happiness and solace, to have her sympathy and tenderness and understanding to look forward to always on into the declining years."

I was so deeply moved, a lump grew in my throat so that I could hardly answer him, but I spoke at last, the sound of tears in my voice:

"Ah! Hugh," I whispered, "indeed I would have loved and cherished you and been your very own, but fate decreed it otherwise, and we are equally to blame—but perhaps it should comfort us, dearest, to have this knowledge that this is what we would both have wished."

I said it with my heart torn with misery, knowing that if what seems the inevitable happens, and the storm-cloud bursts, we can never meet again on earth. But in the mind of Hugh I could see there was growing some unconscious hope that somehow, some day, he will be free and can come back and claim me.

Oh, my dear, my dear—the cruel irony of it!

"Guinevere, do you remember the day we went to Eton?—and the things we talked of then, and how we pictured what we should have felt like if Algernon had been my son. I often go over again those tender scenes, darling. And when a man has come through the fire of awful suffering as I have, with the bitter anguish of knowing his present pain is caused by his own action, it clears his view as to the value of things. And I know now that nothing on earth could ever have compared with even the memory of your true love. If Kathleen's parentage had been without flaw, I should have probably been still more unhappy than I am, because I should have felt unspeakably degraded as soon as our first rush of passion had passed. When love is as our love was, Guinevere, a man can have no other mate. Darling, think of it! It has lasted seven years!"

We were standing at the very end of the parade where the walk stops and the rocks and country are wild again,

and the westerly wind, rising, blew in our faces there in the lurid gorgeousness of an angry setting sun.

Hugh bent and again looked right into my eyes.

"Guinevere, my worshipped angel," he pleaded, "say once more that you love me, that I may carry the blessed words away with me into the wilds, to comfort me and speak to me of a far-off hope of glorious things. Say it, Guinevere!"

"Hugh," I answered him, and I kept my voice steady, "I love you with every part of my being, heart and mind and body and soul, now and for everlasting."

And then I caught my breath and turned away—for the iron had entered into me, and, blinding my eyes, had blotted out the sun.

In a few days—in a few hours, even—Hugh may know, as I do, that my son is Kathleen's lover, and then for him and me there can only be an eternal farewell.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AUGUST, 1912

We dined together on the *Hermione,* our whole party, in honor of Hugh's arrival. In our walk back to the gardens, I had tried to speak of lighter things to hide the agony in my heart—and we had talked of Bransdale and what Hugh had done there, and then we joined Letitia again, sitting now in her usual chair by the tree on the steep, sloping lawn above the landing stage—and Hugh went off in his launch in the rough water. The two yachts were lying very close together, or I do not think we could have ventured to have gone to dine; the incessant storms which have blasted this summer are still going on. We were quite splashed with spray, even in our hooded electric launch—and glad to be hoisted on board.

Kathleen was in full evening dress—a most daring arrangement of skin-tight twisted draperies, showing every line of her glorious figure. She looked the incarnation of voluptuous young womanhood, and the spirit of her great-grandmother seemed strong in her to-night; she flashed her eyes and undulated in her movements with a perpetual suggestion of cakewalk, which she pretended was caused by the rolling of the yacht, until Algernon whispered something to her, peremptory, passionate order, and then she was still, throwing herself among the cushions on the sofa in the deck-house where some of us were sitting; the party was too large for us all to be there, so the rest had gone below. Here she pouted and sulked until dinner was announced, and we all went down. Hugh had not yet appeared from his cabin, but joined us in the saloon.

I had not seen him and Kathleen together since that day in February at lunch at Minton Dremont, except in church,

when they could not speak, and I saw at once that the situation between them was more than ever strained. She spent the time in hurling ceaseless gibes at him, or in whispering jokes to Henry Germaine, who was on her left hand, and making every one at the table hideously uncomfortable, while my son's eyes blazed with furious passion, and I knew that the devil was in them both.

Hugh behaved with great dignity, apparently taking not the slightest notice of her, but confining his conversation to Letitia, who sat on his right hand—and I, who was on his left, devoted my whole attention to Freddy Burgoyne. Thus the dinner went on and ended—and then Kathleen said she meant to dance—she had just learned the tango, and she must teach it to Algernon and Henry Germaine.

She has had a pianola attachment put on to Hugh's old piano, and she insisted upon Langthorpe sitting down and playing it, while she gyrated about, swaying her hips, in the rather limited space in the centre of the saloon. The dining-table is at the side, and behind it on the sofa Letitia and Hugh and I still sat with Lord Catesby, while Freddy Burgoyne stood clapping his hands to keep time.

It is ridiculous for people to be disapproving or shocked at the ways of this age—and youth must have its expression; but never at any theatre have I seen anything so alluringly wicked, or unmistakably suggestive, as was the dancing of Kathleen, while she practised her tango with first Henry and then Algernon. My son's eyes swam with passion, and Hugh's face was very pale, and had on it an expression of extreme disgust, as he steadily averted his gaze. Then, when the fun was at its height, he rose and asking Letitia if she would not like some air, went with her out of the door and up to the deckhouse.

At this, Kathleen turned and made a face at his retreating figure, like a naughty street child, and Lord Catesby, frowning and red with chagrin, got up and said something in her ear. But her temper was evidently too excited to be calmed.

"Why don't you go to the deckhouse, too, then, papa!" she cried aloud, "and join my precious husband, if you don't like our fun. Lord Langthorpe's the only darling old man I have ever known!"

Algernon looked uncomfortable—he hates her to be in this mood, I could plainly see—he interposed here, and suggested that Langthorpe might be tired of playing, and that some lemon squashes would be a good thing. Then Kathleen sat on the table and dangled her feet. The movement

of the ship was not very great, but she made the most of it, and pretended to slip off on to the floor—and while I answered Lord Catesby in the general din of a new two-step Freddy Burgoyne had begun at the piano, I heard Algernon whisper to her fiercely as he helped her up:

"Pull yourself together this minute, darling—or I'll make you—before them all!" His face was savage, and yet full of passionate admiration—for anything so superbly beautiful as the lovely creature looked, pouting there on the floor and then laughing and showing her white teeth, I cannot imagine. The whole scene was one of horrible pain, and I determined to escape from it, so pleading the desire also for air, I got Lord Catesby to take me up on deck. There we found Hugh and Letitia pacing up and down, wrapped in thick coats, in the wind.

After a minute or two, we four went back into the deck-house, and from below could hear the sounds of wild laughter, and now the rattle of castanets. Evidently, the fun and dancing were still going on. Then presently, flushed and panting, Kathleen and the three young men and Langthorpe appeared at the bottom of the companion.

"I tell you, I am not in the least afraid," we heard her say. "I shall go with you to-morrow to Southampton, Algernon, in your *Fire Queen*. That jolly Neptune will look after us, and we will show these old frumps how fast we can rush along. I will be ready at half-past twelve sharp on the steps by the pier—then we can get a better start in that long piece of smooth water," and her mocking laugh rang out. Hugh rose from his seat and stood on the top of the stair.

"I simply won't allow you to go in this weather, Kathleen," he said sternly. "It is dangerous enough for Algernon alone, but with the responsibility of another passenger—it is sheer madness—and, remember, you cannot swim."

She looked up wickedly at him.

"Don't flatter yourself I shall pay the slightest attention to your commands, old fidgety darling," she laughed. "It is a fine time of day for you to begin taking an interest in me."

Hugh got very pale, and his face hardened into stone.

"I absolutely forbid you to go—do you hear?" he said icily. "Algernon, I request you to help me by refusing to take her—you know the danger yourself."

Algernon murmured something in a rather insolent tone, the actual words of which I could not hear, and Letitia,

with her usual tact, diverted the ugly situation by asking if the lemon squashes were in the saloon; and so a general move there was made, and when I got close to Algernon I whispered my entreaties to him not to thing of starting to-morrow if the sea should be as rough as it is to-night—but he only laughed in my face, and answered:

"Really, mother, you are all such a set of wretched old mollycoddles; I wonder you don't suggest my running an old paddle-boat—thank goodness, Kathleen is not like you; she has got some pluck."

There was nothing more to be said, I saw; but as I do not think Kathleen will dare really disobey Hugh, Algernon may decide to stay with her and not start alone. I must comfort myself with that.

Hugh and I had hardly exchanged a single word, but when we said good night a little while later, he held my hand for an instant, and he whispered:

"I hope you think, Guinevere, that I bear it as well as I can."

And now I am wide awake, sleep will not come—the picture of Hugh's unhappiness is haunting me, and the defiance on the face of my son.

What will the morrow bring? Only trouble of some sort, even if they do not go in the *Fire Queen*—all is at such tension I feel it in the air, and Letitia has not come to chat with me in my cabin, as is her wont. She, too, is oppressed with the dreadful situation, although I hope she does not guess the deeper meaning which I know.

. . . . . .

Algernon went off ashore early this morning before I was up. I do not think he can mean to take out the *Fire Queen;* it is a horrible squally day, and the yachts which are racing must be having a miserable time.

Letitia and I landed and did some shopping in the town, and then between the showers we sat under the tree on the lawn in the gardens and watched the rocking boats while we talked to our friends.

Hugh was in the Club; we saw him pass us as he went in.

"It was simply disgusting last night, wasn't it, Guinevere?" Letitia said to me at length, when we were left for a moment alone, referring to the subject of our last evening, which she had ominously avoided until then.

"The girl isn't a lady for all her hundreds of Catesby ancestors—one would have thought it was a nigger out for

a holiday," she went on. "But you have never been in America and down South, so you can't judge of that, Guinevere. I have, though, and know the blacks' ways. Her movements are exactly like them. It is incredible that Lord Catesby should have permitted such an exhibition."

"Youth will express itself. We must not be hard on her," I answered. I did not want to talk about it at all. I was overwhelmed enough as it was with foreboding, and preferred to avoid discussing the remembrance of last night.

"It is appalling for poor Hugh," Letitia went on feelingly. "He tells me he is going away again, and I don't wonder at all. I should think if he stayed he would shoot himself or her—but it almost serves him right for marrying her—any one else would have seen the sort of character she had; he was too blindly infatuated, though. I wonder how it will end." Then she remarked more lightly:

"I hope Algernon won't become attracted by her. I have thought lately once or twice I have seen some signs of it; have you noticed it, Guinevere?"

Then as I only murmured a reply, she went on:

"There is one thing I am pleased about; you and Hugh seem to be sensible friends together at last. I was glad you went for a walk with him yesterday; he looked so much happier when you came in."

So even my clear-sighted, keen Letitia has not guessed anything. I almost sighed aloud my relief.

"I wonder what Kathleen is doing this morning, she has not come ashore, as far as I have seen," I said. "Algernon went off before I could catch him. I wanted to try and persuade him to promise me not to go out in the *Fire Queen*—I don't think he will—it is too rough, but he continually makes one nervous."

Letitia laughed.

"He would not have paid the least attention to you," she responded, "it would have been waste of breath. But did not you see them in the town; they passed when we were coming out of the post office, he and Kathleen—they have probably gone off in his motor to play golf."

I cannot say why, but it seemed like some horrible dream as we sat there in the gardens. I could not shake off my feeling of anxiety. After the scene last night things cannot go on calmly, and we have still some days before the week ends.

At last I felt so disturbed, I could not sit there and talk lightly any longer, and, leaving Letitia with Freddy Bur-

goyne, who had just come up, I went down the landing-stage and, getting into the waiting launch, came back on board. And here I am sitting with a vague restlessness upon me—and the clock has just struck half-past twelve.

. . . . . .

Ah! God, how can I write it—the final agony has come—as the stroke finished, something seemed to force me to go upon deck. This was the hour fixed for the starting of the *Fire Queen*—supposing Algernon was still determined to go out. I got my glasses and leant there on the rail, scanning anxiously the direction from whence the motor-boat would come.

Surely my son would not be so mad as to venture—surely Kathleen would not dare deliberately to disobey Hugh for all her insolent defiance.

I could distinguish nothing at first, but as I watched I at last perceived the long white thing with a man in it close by the pier-steps at the side of where the steamboats land their passengers. And, yes, there was a woman's figure, all clad in those new red oilskins, being carefully handed in—I knew it was Kathleen, for had she not bought those very garments with Letitia and myself on Monday at Redfern's in the town, delighting in their new shape and bright shade.

So she had disobeyed Hugh and followed her own will. I watched them in trembling anxiety—the water, once they would be beyond the shelter of the castle, was rough, the waves beginning to be crested with white foam. It was absolute madness for any motor-boat to attempt going to Southampton in such a sea. I tried to calm my terror by telling myself that they would certainly turn up the river, not out into the Roads, and I waited there for what seemed to be long moments—shivering with sickening dread.

Then I saw clearly that the two were settled and Algernon had for a second put his arm round Kathleen, while his mechanic gave him some last directions. I could see even the expression upon their laughing, beautiful faces—with the powerful Zeiss glasses, and then the white instrument of death shot forward with incredible speed, and before I could take a breath almost, they passed the bows where I stood, and, shooting ahead in a cloud of spray, seemed suddenly in swerving to avoid a fishing boat to spring into the air and then turned downward.

They had crashed straight into the *Chequers* buoy.

The hideous, hideous horror of the moment—I screamed

aloud, and then found myself struggling in the arms of Angus Fergusson, the first mate.

I suppose in my agony I had rushed forward to get into the sea.

"You canna do anything, me lady," the man said kindly. "Something must ha' knocked them out; they've gone down like a stone."

And it is thus God answered my impassioned prayer to avert that other tragedy from falling upon our two homes.

Oh! the bitter, pitiful anguish of it—my son—my darling son.

. . . . . .

The two gloriously beautiful young bodies were recovered at last, clasped together. The shock must have stunned them, for Algernon was a strong swimmer and would certainly have held up Kathleen.

And they had no horror on their splendid young faces, superb as gods in the dignity of death, only a sort of proud defiance. And as I gazed up on them it seemed as though I realized about all the agony of my grief that their lot was perhaps to be envied. They had died together in the full zenith of life and love, before my shadows came to darken their happiness, and I remembered how willingly Hugh and I would have taken their places on that night four years ago when he had wished we might sink down into the blue waters forever, fused together for eternity in peace.

. . . . . .

And now I am back at Redwood Moat once more—and my son has been laid to rest beside his father and that long line of Bohuns in the family vault in the church, and this house of misery and blood and death passes to a distant cousin now far away in a Western mining-camp. And tomorrow I leave its dark portals forever, haunted as they are with memories of anguish and pain.

Kathleen, too, sleeps in the same church in the burial place of the Dremonts—so in death they are not divided—and after the funeral Hugh went straight off out of England upon that long expedition he talked of into the wilds.

He saw from the Castle platform the tragedy of the *Chequers* buoy as I saw it from the bows of the yacht.

So all is done and they rest together, Algernon and Kathleen, and no one will ever know that the beautiful young

beings were lovers; their secret is locked deep in my desolate broken heart.

The night is very still, there is not a sound, even of those sad voices sighing to me as they were wont to do of old in pitiful moanings. I seem to be utterly alone.

I will look once more from the east window across the park to Minton Dremont and say my long farewell.

. . . . . .

All the clouds which covered the sky a while ago have disappeared, leaving unshadowed blue-black depths, and over the dark tree-tops above the tall chimneys there is rising a star, a pure and lovely sphere of light, as once before I saw it rise with a promise of hope.

Is it God's message?

And then I fell upon my knees at the open window, and it seemed as though a spirit whispered in my ear:

"Peace be unto you, poor sorrowful one, the price is paid at last."

And I stayed there watching the tender omen until the sky lightened and I knew that dawn was at hand.

The dawn of a new day for Hugh and me.

THE END

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